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The Tristan Legend: a Barometer of Love and Art in the Victorian Period.

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The Louisiana State University and
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**THE TRISTAN LEGEND:
A BAROMETER OF LOVE AND ART IN THE VICTORIAN PERIOD**

A Dissertation

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

in

The Department of English

**by
James Alton Cowan
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M.A., Louisiana State University, 1964
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ABSTRACT

Because the Victorians not only rediscovered but often re-interpreted it, the Tristan legend offers one barometer to the changing Victorian attitudes toward love and art. Unlike their contemporary, Wagner, they were unable to reduce the story to its elemental passion, erotic love; instead, they found in it an irreconcilable conflict between domestic and passionate love, a conflict which they transmuted into the Victorian conflict between didacticism and aestheticism in art, until, in Hardy's naturalistic version, those distinctions collapse.

Arnold ("Tristram and Iseult") and Tennyson ("The Last Tournament") take a moral approach to the legend. Arnold betrays a fascination with the passionate lovers, Tristan and Queen Iseult, but reserves his primary sympathy for the representative of domestic love, Iseult of Brittany. He not only creates for her a domestic milieu complete with two children, offspring of Tristan, but also makes her the heroine of his poem. Tennyson subordinates the Tristan story to his larger design in the Idylls: the devastation inherent in breaking the marriage vows. In his hands, the passionate lovers become a savage parody of Lancelot and Guinevere, the first of Arthur's subjects to break the vows. By contrast, and largely by implication, the loyal Iseult of Brittany emerges as the most sympathetic character of the original legend.

Swinburne (Tristram of Lyonesse) and Symons (Tristan and Iseult) react aesthetically to the legend. Writing under the influence of Wagner, they respond chiefly to the beauty of passionate love. Swinburne recognizes that erotic love may be an illusion and therefore grants Tristan complete fulfillment only in his encounter with the sea. But domestic love, epitomized by Iseult of Brittany, is a more dangerous illusion, resulting in bitterness, jealousy, and destructiveness when it is not satisfied. Symons finds in domestic love a poignant beauty all its own, but eventually sees passionate love as superior. In general, he paints the beauty of love in conflict: passionate love in conflict with honor, domestic love in conflict with generosity and selflessness.

Hardy (The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall) finally obliterates, or at least blurs, the distinctions between domestic and passionate love. Writing from a naturalistic perspective, he sees both types of love as doomed to disillusionment and eventual failure. As in Greek tragedy, fate operates externally (through the potion and the symbol of the sea) and internally (through character) to destroy the possibility of fulfillment in either type of love. Because his version seeks no ideal in love, Hardy represents a step toward modern realism in the depiction of love. Not love itself but the struggle to wrest from trying circumstances a moment of love is, for Hardy, the real glory.

INTRODUCTION

One of the remarkable achievements of the Victorian age, whose writers often sought inspiration from the past, was the rediscovery of the Tristan legend. For nearly four hundred years this legend had lain dormant, rarely even alluded to, though English readers knew one version of the story from Malory's Le Morte Darthur. Suddenly in the middle of the nineteenth century this tale of passionate love fell on fertile ground, probably because it presented two types of love in conflict: domestic and passionate. Not only could moralists like Arnold and Tennyson find in the story a type of love to condemn--the passionate, in the illicit affair of Tristan and Queen Iseult--but they could also point to its destructive effects on both the lovers and those around them, especially Iseult of the White Hands, Tristan's wife, whom he deserts for Queen Iseult. The passionate love of Tristan and Iseult violated their beliefs about marriage and social stability; on the other hand, Iseult of the White Hands provided them an exemplar of social order and marital fidelity. The aesthetes found the legend appealing for just the opposite reason. Writing under the influence of Wagner, whose opera Tristan und Isolde capped the revival of interest in the Tristan legend, Swinburne and Symonds recognized and celebrated the beauty of passionate love, fated though it might be. Even when they detected beauty in domestic love (Symonds, in particular), they did not moralize that

love but simply painted its beauty, whether painful or joyful.

Hardy, as clearly as the moralists and aesthetes, knew the conflict of domestic and passionate love but found nothing except the sheer fascination of love particularly commendatory about either. In his version of *Tristan*, love of both types is doomed.

The five versions of *Tristan* discussed in this study reveal not only the poets' attitudes toward love but their attitudes toward art as well. When all five versions are viewed as a whole, the division in the Victorian temperament between morality and aestheticism finds expression in the poets' attitudes toward the domestic and passionate love dramatized in the legend. In fact, their attitudes toward love and art seem inextricably bound. My purpose here is to analyze the ways in which domestic love in conflict with passionate love is transmuted into the Victorian conflict between morality and aestheticism, until, in Hardy's early modern, more naturalistic version of the legend, the conflict is obliterated, or at least blurred in its distinctions. To support this evolution, I shall point up the contrasts between the two *Iseults* in each version and attempt to demonstrate that the imagery of land and sea further reinforces the division between domestic and passionate love, didactic and aesthetic art. For nearly always the land symbolizes security, stability, order; but the sea symbolizes fate, passion, freedom. In Hardy alone this distinction collapses, as both land and sea suggest doom.

Chapter I, "Backgrounds," emphasizes first the growth and

development of the Victorian cult of love and then the conflict between the didactic and aesthetic aims of art in both individual authors and in the larger literary movements denominated by those terms. Following a brief look at the naturalism of Hardy, the chapter concludes with a short summary of the Tristan legend and its medieval sources. Chapter II treats the moralistic approach to the legend in Arnold's "Tristram and Iseult" and Tennyson's "The Last Tournament." Chapter III first deals with Wagner's Tristan und Isolde and then demonstrates how Swinburne and Symonds, under Wagner's influence, responded aesthetically to the legend in Tristram of Lyonesse and Tristan and Iseult, respectively. Chapter IV is devoted to Hardy's naturalistic version of Tristan, The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall. The Conclusion summarizes the contributions each Victorian artist and literary movement made to the Tristan story and points out that even for modern artists the legend has proved fruitful. Throughout, the names Tristan and Iseult are used to refer to the general legend; otherwise, the spellings of these and other proper names follow the particular versions being discussed.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUNDS:

VICTORIAN LOVE AND ART AND THE MEDIEVAL TRISTAN

Victorian love--the very concept is still likely to suggest prudery and puritanism to the modern mind, despite the extensive critical re-valuation and re-estimation of Victorian life and literature. And, indeed, much of the charge is true, especially when judged by modern attitudes toward love. For the process of analyzing love which began with such men as H. G. Wells, Havelock Ellis, Julian Huxley, and Sigmund Freud has passed to more physiological analysts such as Kinsey and Masters and Johnson and has, in due course, deprived love of its mystery. Long before the massive studies of Kinsey and Masters and Johnson, Joseph Wood Krutch could say in 1929:

When the consequences of love were made less momentous, then love itself became less momentous too, and we have discovered that the now-lifted veil of mystery was that which made it potentially important as well as potentially terrible. Sex, we learned, was not so awesome as once we had thought; God does not care so much about it as we had formerly been led to suppose; but neither, as a result, do we. Love is becoming gradually so accessible, so unmysterious, and so free that its value is trivial.¹

The later studies have simply further eroded the mystery.

For many of the high Victorians, however, love was taken seriously, was, in fact, hallowed and sanctified in both their lives and writings. At the center of this new "religion of

love" stood the woman, idealized and made into a priestess, if not a goddess. In The Victorian Frame of Mind, Walter E. Houghton cites as examples of the attempt to divinize woman Browning's worship of Elizabeth Barrett, Mill's devotion to Harriet Taylor, Leslie Stephen's exaltation of Julia Duckworth, and Coventry Patmore's adoration of his "angel in the house."² Of Patmore's Angel in the House, he says the title reveals the essence of Victorian love: "the passion that was very much tempered by reverence and confined to the home--that is, to potential or actual marriage--and the object was scarcely mortal."³ The extent to which this attitude was taken seriously may be demonstrated by one of Stephen's letters to Julia Duckworth: "You must let me tell you that I do and always shall feel for you something which I can only call reverence as well as love . . . You see, I have not got any saints and you must not be angry if I put you in the place where my saints ought to be."⁴

The Brownings' devotion to the religion of love is well documented in their poetry as well as in their lives. Otis Wheeler, in "The Sacramental View of Love in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," and Houghton cite many examples. Wheeler refers, for instance, to Elizabeth Browning's Aurora Leigh to show the effect on a young lover of his betrothed:

A face flashed like a cymbal on his face
And shook with silent clangor brain and heart
Transfiguring him to music. Thus, even thus,
He too received his sacramental gift
With eucharistic meanings; for he loved.⁵

Yet other writers, whose lives do not so well illustrate the ideal of love, express a similar devotion in their works. Tennyson's Maud, Wheeler points out, sacramentalizes love: The narrator feels, when Maud leaves him one evening, "The gates of Heaven are closed"; later he says her "gentle will has changed my fate, / And made my life a perfumed altar-flame"; and finally he defies the stars, symbolic to him of the coldness and emptiness of the world described by science: "But now shine on, and what care I / Who in this stormy gulf have found a pearl / The countercharm of space and hollow sky." The narrator is, in other words, "reborn" through love, his "lover-savior" a woman.⁶ Other poems of Tennyson, though not couched so much in religious or sacramental terms, betray a like preoccupation with love as man's salvation. In Memoriam, perhaps the most representative of all Victorian poems in its struggle between faith and doubt, celebrates not only the permanence of love but its ability to confer self-knowledge and hope where nothing else can; the epithalamion ("Epilogue"), though it may seem in some ways a mere tag, symbolizes the one possible union of spirits and the one possibility of continuity--through love. If Idylls of the King does not celebrate ideal love, it at least shows the destructive consequences of the breakdown of love in the failure of Arthur's knights to follow his injunction "To lead sweet lives in purest chastity, / To love one maiden only, cleave to her, / And worship her by years of noble deeds. . . ." ⁷ Arnold and Ruskin likewise felt the

redemptive power of love. Arnold's "Euphrosyne" and "Dover Beach" treat love as man's only hope, his salvation, in a world of turmoil and strife. Ruskin, in love the most unfortunate of Victorians, nonetheless cherished the ideal of love; it was the "source of the highest and purest mortal happiness," the "purifying passion of the soul," and the old chivalric ideal of devotion to the lady was, therefore, worthy of following even in the Victorian era.⁸

Ruskin's reference to chivalry calls attention to another feature of the worship of woman in a religion of love--that it was not simply a sudden development of nineteenth-century life and literature. Since its birth in eleventh-century Languedoc, the phenomenon of courtly love has, according to C. S. Lewis, provided Western literature with its most common theme: love. Lewis suggests the scenario for the growth of courtly love as the typical Provencal court with its lord, his lady and her damsels, and a large number of unattached males, inferior to their lord and lady but superior to the surrounding peasantry. These males found their only source of "courtesy" or female charm in the lady, and thus--possibly--began the worship of the "lady" by men for whom there was no possibility of matrimony.⁹ Denis de Rougemont, in Love in the Western World, feels more certain that courtly love grew out of the Catharist (Albigensian) heresy, which posited its most basic belief in a dualistic, Manichean universe: Man, whose divine soul (created by God or Love) was entrapped in matter (created by the Demiurge or Evil), sought release from the physical world

(Night) into the spiritual (Light) through a Feminine Principle. But what the courtly lover really loves is Love itself; the Fair Lady so often found in troubadour poetry is merely imaginary or "possibly man's spiritual element, that which the soul imprisoned in his body desires with a nostalgic love that death alone can satisfy."¹⁰ He cannot love an actual Lady, for she too is imprisoned in matter, in evil; he needs her not for herself but only to keep his passion alive. The passion that arises out of courtly love, then, is fraught with suffering and danger, for it can never be consummated except in death; in fact, "passion means suffering," and while the lover undergoes his preparation for that final consummation, he discovers--or invents--all manner of obstacles which keep him and his earthly lover apart.¹¹ Elsewhere, de Rougemont says passionate love can operate only through the imposition of obstacles, whether social, political, or moral; the obstacle provides "the necessary distance by which the mutual attraction, instead of being mitigated or exhausted by sensual gratification, is metamorphosed into passion."¹² In Love in the Western World, he uses the Gottfried von Strassburg version (ca. 1210) of the Tristan-Iseult legend to show how the passion of courtly love has insinuated itself into the Western psyche, consciously or unconsciously, and how this passion is incompatible with marriage; this "myth" of passionate love, as he calls it, reaches its fullest statement in Richard Wagner's Tristan and Isolde (1859). Afterward, it is debased and sentimentalized in middle-class films and literature, but its seductive power

and its most pernicious result--adultery--have remained, so that anyone unfamiliar with the significance of the Tristan legend is likely to see in Tristan's adultery "a splendid experience more magnificent than morality."¹³

D. W. Robertson, in A Preface to Chaucer, disagrees sharply with de Rougemont on the origin and development of courtly love; he contends that such works as Capellanus' The Art of Courtly Love and the original versions of Tristan are squarely in the Christian tradition, that they are Christian parodies of a so-called "religion of love," that they are indeed examples of foolish behavior and warnings against establishing love as a religion.¹⁴ This opinion basically accords with that of Lewis, who views the courtly love "religion" as a parody of the only religion the troubadours knew--medieval Christianity.¹⁵ Robertson agrees with de Rougemont, however, on the popularization and sentimentalization of the myth in the nineteenth century; he quotes Schlegel's assertion "that in romantic poetry 'the impressions are to be hallowed, as it were, by a mysterious connexion with higher feelings'" and goes on to insist that the romantics actually created the myth by transforming a Christian parody of love into a sentimentalized but serious religion.¹⁶

Although this creation of a passionate myth may be true of the English romantics--and perhaps it may be partially true of such poems as Shelley's "Alastor" and "Epipsychidion"--it cannot, I think, be fairly charged against the Victorian religion of love. To be sure, there are similarities. The

language of passion pervades much of their poetry, at times its proponents seem to be in love with love itself, and no one would deny that the stance is often sentimental and not the real answer to the perplexing problems of the century. The Victorians have, in fact, often been chided with accepting compromises and easy answers rather than facing issues head-on and pursuing them to their logical ends, bitter as those ends might be. But in two important respects, Victorian love differs from that religion of love derived from courtly love. First, the Victorians expected their love to be consummated in marriage. Though the establishment of a paradise on earth through love may be sheer illusion, they were under no delusion, as were the proponents of courtly love, that they could transcend this world through a love that was not consummated in marriage. Marriage was, indeed, the goal of their love. Second, the ethic of purity which infused Victorian love not only prescribed marriage but forbade the almost inevitable result of courtly love--adultery. Lewis observes that the nineteenth century regarded adulterous love as "'dishonourable'" and points out that romantic love could be considered virtuous only if it was directed towards marriage.¹⁷ His entire study drives toward the conclusion that Spenser, through the allegory of Britomart, who is really "married love" and whose enemy is courtly love, is "the greatest among the founders of that romantic conception of marriage which is the basis of all our love literature from Shakespeare to Meredith."¹⁸ It is safe

to conclude that the Victorians would have agreed with this assessment; wherever chastity and passion inform their religion of love, they essentially mean virtuous ("married") love or a desirable condition that leads to marriage. It is almost impossible to avoid the term passionate when discussing their attitude toward love, but a better term would surely be domestic.

One of the major reasons why the Victorians, according to Houghton, exalted love was to try to combat the rising sensuality in England, a trend aided and abetted by the literature of "prostitution" and "free love" flooding the bookstores--from France, the novels of Balzac, Sue, and George Sand; from home, the works of Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Shelley, and such medical treatises as Dr. G. R. Drysdale's The Elements of Social Science: Physical, Sexual, and Natural Religion. Patmore's "happy synthesis of love and virtue" in The Angel in the House was a welcome weapon against this rising tide to many worried Victorians, for it fought "the fire of hell with that of heaven."¹⁹ Furthermore, this new religion of love was paradoxically a protest against the marriage system itself, a system in which marriage often had nothing to do with the heart or love, but with wealth or social position or some external motive. Such motives, plus the long period of courtship required for a young man to reach a respectable monetary status, practically assured loveless marriages and decreed a rise in the "great social evil" of prostitution through

adultery and pre-marital sex. Tennyson's Maud aptly illustrates the social system's ability to frustrate marriage.²⁰

These motives for consecrating love, though they help to explain the phenomenon, are largely sociological, external. Other reasons, if not profounder, are at least more closely related to those who made of love a religion. For one, the intellectual Victorian, such as Matthew Arnold, could find in love a refuge from mental struggle and a "resolution of psychological tensions," a refuge which could save him from utter skeptical negation.²¹ Second, and more important, many of those who found security in love were deeply troubled by the continuing scientific erosions of traditional religious values. They were victims of doubt. Most thinkers, G. M. Young says, had accommodated themselves to astronomy but had more difficulty coping with the signal advances in geology, biology, and Biblical criticism (Higher Criticism).²² Even though Tennyson's In Memoriam had anticipated Darwin's The Origin of Species (1859) by nine years and had seemed to provide answers to all the religious doubts, the answers were not totally satisfactory, for the age craved another dogma for every refuted one. And those most troubled were "the finest minds, who are most sensitive to the breaking-up of faiths and traditions and most apprehensive of the outcome."²³ The crisis had been building for several decades, particularly since Lyell's Principles of Geology (1830-33) and Chambers' Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (1844); but it was Darwin who finally forced the

question.

From an even broader perspective, Darwinism was the logical outcome of an intellectual movement, positivism, which had operated for more than a century, taking shape first in the works of Hobbes, Locke, and Newton. This tradition, according to Noel Gilroy Annan, "claimed to be scientific because it applied to human behavior the methods of inductive and deductive reasoning that Newton had hallowed."²⁴ Within this empirical tradition there developed a philosophical movement called Positivism, which advocated its own Religion of Humanity to exalt man. Endeavoring to furnish a new faith to a rationalistic age, Positivism may be viewed as "an implicit response to Darwinism: Man exalted instead of Man Degraded."²⁵ Though the church it proposed was rationalistic, it exerted a large influence on the mid-Victorian sensibility and may be connected to the religion of love, not from impulse but from the object of worship, man himself (or woman). At the same time, the Higher Criticism further opened the door to religious doubt, especially the Leben Jesu of David Strauss, translated by George Eliot in 1846. The critical spirit applied to the Bible was not intended to rob Divine Scripture of its ethical and spiritual significance but to demonstrate its value as a "body of symbol and myth" rather than as literal fact.²⁶ For those Victorians trained in the Evangelical tradition, however, it often had, ironically, the reverse effect, and many, Evangelical or not,

had to seek assurance, to find a source of faith, elsewhere. Arnold and Ruskin are but two examples.

One avenue was love. From a religious-philosophical angle, the nineteenth-century tendency to sacramentalize love is, to Wheeler, a possible outgrowth of the divinizing of nature. This "natural" religion began with Deism, in which man sought God through the analytical study of nature; but when this approach eroded the mysteries of nature, man then sought God through an intuitive, mystical approach called Transcendentalism. In this stage, God, or the Divine Spirit, was immanent in both man and nature, but the ravages of science continued and finally eliminated God from nature altogether. In the final stage, "the stress shifted from immanence of divine spirit in nature to immanence of divine spirit in man. If one could no longer seek God in the mysteries of nature, one could still seek Him in the mysteries of self; and for this search the most mysterious elements of the self--love, sexuality, fertility--became the focal points."²⁷ If Basil Willey, after reiterating Mill's arguments against "following nature," can still (in 1957) find through love of nature "certain valuable states of mind which are not only not hostile to religious insight, but are positively akin to it,"²⁸ then it seems conceivable that the Victorians could find religious comfort in love of man while aware of its pitfalls. For where Willey finds "religious insight" in nature (the "Not-Me" of Mill's essay), they could find it in man (the "Me," the individual

and man collectively).

And finally, if, as Willey asserts, neither Christianity nor science has ever been able to extinguish man's deep, psychic instinct to worship nature,²⁹ neither have they been able to squelch that deep-seated urge to worship his inner, spiritual nature. From the time of Plato through the various Manichean religions to the present, man has often sought divinity in Eros. This love, of which courtly love is, to de Rougemont, but one manifestation, is acquisitive (seeking its object for its value), egocentric (centering in the self and its destiny), upward in movement ("man's way to the Divine"), and escapist (a "flight from this world").³⁰ At its two extremes, this impulse has led to a complete negation of the flesh in pursuit of union with the divine or simply devolved into orgiastic ritual.³¹ That it is still a threat to the social fabric is de Rougemont's major premise.

It is important to insist here that Victorian love, though sharing some of these traits of Eros, certainly avoids the extremes; its advocates, instead, shaped and ritualized love to fit their own needs, both personal and social. For them love may be "the way to the Divine," but it is not completely selfish and certainly not escapist--it centers in the hearth, the home, the most fundamental of all social institutions. If it is Eros at all, it is Eros tamed and domesticated and made altruistic, not only to rescue the individual but to save society as well, not to escape from it.

Whatever its origins and however it may be interpreted, the Victorian religion of love rescued many a beleaguered proponent from doubt and despair and seemed to convert him into a new being. It provided him with an object, albeit human, on which to vent his religious fervor and assured him "of a divine world, manifested here in the flesh."³² Ultimately, however, it proved susceptible to the changing currents of Victorian taste and art.

As the aesthetic movement, largely submerged since the early Tennyson, gained momentum, its advocates scoffed at and brushed aside many of the earlier Victorians' most cherished values, including sacramental love. With beauty as its credo, aestheticism proclaimed the autonomy of the artist and advocated art as vision, without regard to social and moral values. It did not, of course, eradicate the moral aesthetic but simply declared open war against an art whose standards were dictated by society. As early as 1866, Swinburne's Poems and Ballads shocked the Philistines in its celebration of perverse sensuality, but an earlier poem, disregarded in 1859 when it was published, soon captured a wider audience with its appeal to a pessimistic hedonism--Fitzgerald's version of The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám. These two volumes were championed by other artists who subscribed to an art-for-art's sake position, and by the eighties and nineties the voices of the aesthetic movement had triumphed over the vatic voice of the high Victorians. Whether from belief, perversity, or audacity, artists such as Swinburne, Rossetti,

Beardsley, and Wilde celebrated a sensual love completely at odds with the love advocated by the earlier "moral" Victorians. For the aesthetes, art, not love, was tantamount to religion; love was merely a theme to be employed by the artist, and its expression was not to be circumscribed or dictated by the needs of society.

Long before the open warfare between the moral and the aesthetic, however, the conflict had raged on a private, personal plane. Indeed, from one point of view, Victorian literature is a study in the struggle of these two artistic impulses, first on the personal, then on the public level. Tennyson's early poetry, for example, generates much of its power from the clash between his desire to express his private vision and his conviction that it was his duty to speak to the age. Poems such as "The Lady of Shalott" and "Ulysses" may be read either way, and "The Palace of Art," while taking the moral alternative, leaves open the possibility of returning to the aesthetic: The Soul commands that her palace not be torn down, for "I may return with others there / When I have purged my guilt." Of the "two voices" Tennyson finally chose the didactic, especially with and after In Memoriam, but his art testifies to his long, intense struggle. Both Arnold and Ruskin, high priests of Victorian didacticism, experienced the same dilemma. They felt that art and society shaped each other and, for that reason, attempted to mold their culture into a form that could both create and respond to excellence

in art, but each did so at the expense of his naturally aesthetic bent. Arnold demonstrated the conflict when in the 1850's he gradually relinquished poetry for criticism, feeling that many of his poems, particularly Empedocles on Etna, issued in no morally significant action. He continued, of course, to write an occasional poem ("Thyrsis," e. g.), but devoted most of his energies to criticism, in the course of which he viewed poetry as "a criticism of life" and advocated that it "inspirit and rejoice" the reader and demonstrate "high seriousness." Ruskin, on the other hand, is known to have deleted from The Two Paths several passages which perhaps he felt more sincerely than the published version. For instance, he felt art to be a blind, instinctive urge: "'It is not, observe, a feeling to be described in any exalted terms; it is a sort of hunger, an instinct more like that of the young of a wild beast for its prey, than anything else.'" Further, it has "'hardly anything to do with conscientious or religious feeling.'"³³ Despite this feeling, he, like Tennyson and Arnold and others, chose to speak for his age, to try to redeem society through art.

This moral direction of art suggests that art might provide a function traditionally associated with religion, and to artists such as Arnold and Ruskin it could indeed act as a surrogate for religion. Ironically, though, those who came closest to proclaiming art a religion rejected the moral imperative: the aesthete worshipped at the shrine of art not

for the purpose of salvation but simply for the sake of art itself. That they were indebted to such theorists as Ruskin William A. Madden makes clear in writing of the passages deleted from The Two Paths: "Ruskin's aesthetic provided the basis for a new kind of religion, which can only be described as a religion of art, by shifting the spiritual center of art criticism away from the moral imperatives toward the artist's self-justifying passion."³⁴ In pursuit of beauty, the aesthetes felt that the sole purpose of art was to afford pleasure, both to the artist and the viewer, and that in form rather than content lay the vehicle for communication between the two. As a result, life itself was to be viewed as an art and the senses cultivated for new pleasures. By the end of the century, the art that was worshiped was perhaps as much artifice as genuine art, for form determined all; and the artificial, because opposed to the respectable, was everywhere sought.³⁵

However loudly they sang the virtues of art-for-art's sake, the aesthetes suffered the same agonizing conflict as the moralists did concerning the function of art. Swinburne, for example, felt that art could not reject any theme, social, religious, or otherwise, a contention which his Songs Before Sunrise corroborates; what was of supreme importance was that art must not be sacrificed to message. And, as Buckley points out, he often stated that great poetry "required some animating moral idea."³⁶ Pater and Rossetti objected to a self-sufficient aestheticism, though their followers found in their works

(especially The House of Life and the "Conclusion" to The Renaissance) a rallying point for the new movement.³⁷ Even the extreme aesthetes, often labeled Decadents, found that life demanded some form of morality; Beardsley, Dowson, Thompson, for instance, sought recourse in Roman Catholicism, and Wilde, the most celebrated of all, could never shed his own brand of socialism.³⁸ Buckley sums up their predicament:

Nor did the literary Aesthetes . . . cling long to an amoral art for art. Since language itself was beset forever with ethical connotation, they were forced eventually to abandon all pretense of a complete moral neutrality; while they relented not in their hostility to the Philistine ethic, they became increasingly aware that an amoral literature, if indeed it were possible at all, must betray some moral point of departure.³⁹

In short, the Victorian artist, though of necessity opting for either the didactic or the aesthetic, was aware of conflicting claims upon his art and wrestled with them accordingly. It was only natural that one impulse, having gained ascendancy, would be challenged by the other. From a historical and critical point of view, the ensuing drama elicits interest insofar as it reveals the shifting tastes and moods of Victorian art. One method of investigating this development is to take a single theme and examine its treatment by several authors. The legend of Tristan and Iseult offers just such a possibility, for five Victorians--Tennyson, Arnold, Swinburne, Symonds, and Hardy--reconstruct this ancient tale of passionate love in terms of their attitudes toward love and art. The legend presents two conflicting ideas of love, marital or

domestic (Mark and Iseult; Tristan and Iseult of the White Hands) as opposed to passionate or sensual (Tristan and Iseult), and therefore mirrors, in an oblique way perhaps, the division in the Victorian temperament. Whatever the poet feels about love, as well as what he feels about art, determines how he treats the story. The two ideas--love and art--are inextricably bound; in fact, the thematic conflict of domestic versus passionate love is transmuted into the artistic conflict of morality versus aestheticism, particularly in the versions of Tennyson, Arnold, Swinburne, and Symons.

Hardy's case is somewhat different. A transitional figure between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but with roots solidly in the Victorian tradition, he is, like the others, fascinated by the theme of passionate love. But his art is governed by neither didacticism nor aestheticism. Instead, he attempts to portray man as a victim of chance and circumstance, heredity and environment. This position Hardy derived from his own experience and from Darwin's theory of evolution, which implied that chance and wanton cruelty were the shaping forces of existence.⁴⁰ Hardy's art, though it may be interpreted in other ways, belongs, then, in part to the tradition of literary naturalism, a movement spawned by the same scientific developments which fostered the Victorian cult of love--both grew out of the religious vacuum created by science. But where his predecessors tried to substitute a god for the displaced one, Hardy not only believed the

universe to be godless but felt that God was merely "a figment of the human brain."⁴¹ And his art, both poetry and prose, endeavors to portray man as he is, subject not to a benevolent, omniscient God but to the blind workings of chance. Therein lies the value of his treatment of the Tristan legend to this study. His version, written in 1923, indicates a further shift in artistic tastes and values, away from the Victorian modes to early modern realism.

Relative to what has been said here of Victorian love and art, there are, it seems to me, two points of departure--one thematic, one symbolic--for approaching all five versions of the legend. First, and most important, the two Iseults provide a contrasting situation perfectly suited for the poets to dramatize their attitudes toward marital and passionate love. Unlike Wagner, who ignores the domestic love of Iseult of the White Hands, the English poets adhere more closely to the original story and in various ways make her a character to be reckoned with. Second, in the original versions the sea furnishes an important background motif. Not only do Tristan's voyages link together the kingdoms of Cornwall, Ireland, and Brittany, but it is on one of these voyages that the lovers drink the fatal potion; further, the sea operates as the background for the final episode of the black-white sails. Of all modern versions, the sea is most powerfully felt in the musical surge and swell of Wagner's opera, but the Victorians also, consciously or unconsciously, recognized the function of the

sea, whether they ignored it like Tennyson or emphasized it like Swinburne. From a psychological point of view, the sea (or water) symbolizes, as well as the unconscious, "the fluid of the instinct . . . carnality heavy with passion."⁴² From a literary standpoint, according to W. H. Auden, the sea has functioned since the romantics as "the real situation" and the voyage as "the true condition of man"; the sea is "where the decisive events, the moments of eternal choice, of temptation, fall, and redemption occur."⁴³ The legend attains its real power from the asocial, primitive passion of Tristan and Iseult, who, pushed out by fate from the shores of society, create their own world of love. The sea represents, therefore, passion, freedom, fate; in Hardy's version its continuous presence suggests doom. Conversely, the land signifies security, social bonds, morality, the customs and mores to which Tristan's love of Iseult is immoral and a threat to social stability. Such a scheme, however, is not meant to imply that the English poets deliberately treated the sea of this old legend in such a manner as Jung or Auden indicates; it merely suggests that the sea exercised a power, conscious or unconscious, upon their imaginations.

But before considering exactly how the Victorian imagination shaped the Tristan story, it is necessary to recount the legend briefly. The following account is based chiefly on Bédier, who reconstructed the lost archetype primarily from the three twelfth-century versions of Eilhart von Oberg, Béroul, and

Thomas.⁴⁴

Tristan, the son of Rivalen, King of Leonois, and Blanchefleur, sister of King Mark of Cornwall, derived his name (Fr. triste, "sad") from the circumstances of his birth: Rivalen had been murdered beforehand and Blanchefleur died giving birth to Tristan. Given in charge to Rohalt, Rivalen's marshal, and educated by a squire named Governal, Tristan is, by the time of his capture by Norwegian pirates, quite accomplished in the knightly arts, music, and manners. The weather avenges his capture and forces the pirates to release him in the vicinity of Cornwall, where he eventually enters the court and becomes a favorite, especially of his uncle Mark. After three years Governal finds his way to Tintagel and discloses the identity of Tristan to Mark.

Soon Tristan has a chance to show his prowess. The King of Ireland sends Morholt, a monstrous knight, to Cornwall to exact a tribute of several hundred youths and maidens, and Tristan alone is willing to challenge him. He kills Morholt but is himself gravely wounded. His condition worsening, he chooses to be placed (with only his harp for accompaniment) in a small rudderless boat and pushed out to sea. His music attracts Irish sailors who take him to Iseult, daughter of the Irish king and niece of Morholt; she alone can heal him, but she has vowed to kill her uncle's murderer. Tristan's general condition prevents his identification and thereby assures his healing. When he does finally identify himself,

he gives his name as Tantris. Afterward he returns to Cornwall.

Tristan's successes have meanwhile incited the jealousy of several of Mark's barons, and hoping to get rid of Tristan, they advise Mark to marry in order to have heirs. At that moment a swallow flies in with a strand of golden hair, and Mark, not really wanting to marry, responds that he will wed only the woman from whose head the hair came. Tristan ventures to seek the woman. Again his journeys take him to Ireland, which is now being ravaged by a dragon. Tristan kills the dragon and thereby wins the right to Iseult, the king having promised her to whoever slays the dragon. In combat with the dragon, Tristan is overcome by the poisonous fumes but manages to cut out the dragon's tongue. While he lies in a swoon, the king's false seneschal cuts off the dragon's head and pretends to be the victor. Iseult, however, knows of the seneschal's cowardice, suspects him of deceit, and seeks the dragon's lair where she finds Tristan. After she has taken him to the palace to be healed by her mother, she discovers a notch missing in his sword--a notch matching the fragment she had extracted from Morholt's skull. She swears revenge, but Tristan, suddenly recognizing her golden hair, reminds her that if she kills him she will have to marry the seneschal. She relents. Tristan proves himself the victor and then surprises Iseult by renouncing his claim to her in favor of her marriage to Mark.

Before Tristan and Iseult voyage to Cornwall, her mother prepares a love potion intended to insure the love of Mark and Iseult. On the voyage, Brangien, Iseult's attendant, accidentally gives the potion to Tristan and Iseult; consequently, the two are forever bound in passionate love. Iseult marries Mark but deceives him on her wedding night by substituting Brangien to sleep with him; then fearing Brangien will betray the secret, she orders her murdered. Fortunately for Brangien, the plot fails and she is released to the now repentant Iseult, who is glad to have her back. Brangien remains loyal to Tristan and Iseult throughout their illicit and stormy love affair, often arranging their rendezvous and serving as their protector.

Until Tristan is finally banished from Cornwall, he and Iseult meet clandestinely when they can and usually with great risk of discovery; in fact, the jealous barons often lay traps for them. Most notable of their meetings are the pine-tree episode, the flour trap, and the forest interlude. Since Tristan cannot enter the castle, he communicates with Iseult by means of twigs which he sends down a stream flowing through her chambers. Once when she receives the message, she meets Tristan under a tall pine, where Mark is hiding in the branches. Detecting his shadow in the moonlight, the lovers outwit him: Tristan, declaring that Mark needs him back in court for the king's safety, pleads with Iseult to sue for his return. On another occasion, the conspirators arrange for Tristan to go to

Camelot bearing a message to Arthur. On the night before the journey, Tristan, along with the others (including Iseult), is allowed to sleep in the king's chamber. Knowing that Tristan will try to make love to Iseult while the others sleep, the dwarf Frocin strews flour between their beds. Tristan, awake, recognizes the trap, and when Mark and the Dwarf leave the chamber, he leaps over to Iseult's bed. Mark's plot works, however, when a wound Tristan received during a boar hunt opens and blood spills onto Iseult's bed, the flour, and his own bed. Outraged, Mark decides to burn both of them. Tristan escapes this fate by jumping from the window of a chantry where he had asked to pray before being burned. In the meantime, Iseult is released to an even worse fate--she is given to a band of lepers to satisfy their lust. But Tristan rescues her, and they flee to the forest of Morois, where they spend two years together. Once Mark finds them sleeping in the forest with Tristan's unsheathed sword between them, a sign, he believes, of their innocence; instead of apprehending them, he substitutes his own for Tristan's sword, shields Iseult's eyes from the sun with his glove, and exchanges rings with the sleeping Iseult. When they awaken, the lovers are moved by Mark's gesture; eventually tiring of their existence and somewhat repentant of their conduct, they decide that Iseult should return to the king. Mark accepts her but banishes Tristan.

Before he leaves, however, Tristan performs one last service for his beloved. The jealous barons having determined

that Iseult must undergo an ordeal of red-hot iron to prove her innocence, she arranges for Tristan to dress as a poor pilgrim and meet her at the site of the ordeal. When someone is needed to carry her across a ford, the pilgrim is summoned, and Iseult then swears before God and the onlookers that no one except the king and this beggar has ever held her in his arms. She emerges unscathed from the ordeal.

The final phase of the legend develops the theme and conflict of the two Iseults. The banished Tristan wanders to Brittany, where he saves Duke Hoël from his enemies, establishes a close friendship with Hoël's son Kaherdin, and marries Hoël's daughter, Iseult of the White Hands. Her name, Iseult, haunts him; but he is unable to consummate marriage, thinking instead of Queen Iseult. Offended, Iseult of the White Hands informs her brother, who confronts Tristan with this breach of faith. When Tristan explains his love for Queen Iseult, Kaherdin understands and actually helps him to return to Cornwall to see her. Once, disguised as a leper, Tristan sees the Queen, but, feeling he has betrayed her, she drives him off. Later he returns as a fool or madman; only after Hodain (his faithful dog which he had left with her) recognizes him does Iseult acknowledge him as her lover. For a few days--their last together--they enjoy the solas of love. But the disguise is soon suspected and Tristan leaves again for Brittany. In battle against Kaherdin's enemies, Tristan sustains a wound which only Queen Iseult can heal. He sends for her with a token ring and

bids the messenger hoist a white sail on the ship if she comes, a black sail if she does not. Tristan's wife overhears the plan, and when she sees a white sail, her jealousy prompts her to report a black sail. Tristan dies at her words. Queen Iseult rushes in, finds Tristan dead, lies upon his body, and dies. Mark, having finally learned of the fatal potion which bound them together, takes their bodies back to Cornwall and has them buried side by side. From their graves grow two rose bushes whose branches intertwine.

This story of love and adventure has its basic roots in Celtic tales and oral traditions, though its ultimate origin lies with the Picts, where the name Drust or Drustan (Trystan or Drystan in Welsh) appears as early as the eighth century. From Scotland the Drust stories passed to Wales, where the theme of adulterous love was added, thence to Cornwall, where the setting (especially Tintagel) was fixed around the legendary Cornish king Mark, and finally to Brittany, where the Bretons gave Tristan new parents (Rivalen and Blanchefleur) and added the episodes treating Iseult of the White Hands.⁴⁵ By the twelfth century, French romancers were in possession of the story, and by the time they had refined it, there were Oriental, Arabic, and Latin influences as well as the basic Celtic. Most scholars agree that one of these romancers composed an archetypal Tristan, the common source for the three extant twelfth-century versions.⁴⁶

Of these three versions, only Eilhart's (ca. 1170) is complete. Thomas's version (ca. 1155-70), though fragmentary can be reconstructed from several redactions, chiefly Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan und Isolt (ca. 1210) and the Norse Tristrams Saga (ca. 1226). Béroul's fragment (ca. 1191) treats only the middle of the legend, from the pine-tree episode through the forest interlude. There are, of course, variations in the details of these twelfth-century versions, the most important being the handling of the love philtre. In Eilhart and Béroul, the effect of the love potion is limited to three or four years--thus the return of Iseult to Mark after the forest interlude. In Thomas, the two actually love each other before taking the potion, but it binds them together eternally; and Mark, convinced of their innocence, simply has them brought back from the forest to Tintagel.⁴⁷

For the nineteenth century, however, these texts are less significant than the thirteenth-century versions of Gottfried (Tristan und Isolt, ca. 1210) and the prose romances (dating from various parts of the century). Gottfried, following Thomas, retained the basic outline of the story but shifted its emphasis; interested in character motivation and feeling, he idealized and intensified the lovers' passion, giving it a mystical tenor. When they drank of love, the lovers drank also of death; only death, therefore, could solve their dilemma.⁴⁸ The potion inspired in them lofty feelings but also "compelled them to sin and suffer." They were at the

mercy of a world which did not understand them; indeed, as Loomis asserts, society becomes the villain in Gottfried.⁴⁹ Wagner's use of Gottfried for his opera Tristan und Isolde (1859) is largely responsible for whatever popular currency the legend has in the modern world.

The prose Tristan, on the other hand, re-ordered the legend in both details and emphasis. The primary conflict of law versus passion gives way to a clash between Mark as villain and Tristan as hero, and the foreground of clandestine meetings and rendezvous shifts to Arthurian knight-errantry and chivalry. Tristan, as a member of the Round Table, has a duty to check Mark, an enemy to the ideals of Arthurian knighthood. In the death scene, perhaps the most significant change from the earlier versions, Mark treacherously stabs Tristan while the latter plays and sings for Iseult. By the end of the thirteenth century, this was virtually the only known version of the legend, and it was natural, therefore, that Sir Thomas Malory would use it as the source of Books VIII-XII of his Le Morte Darthur (1485).⁵⁰ Not only did he, like his source, emphasize knight-errantry, blacken Mark's character, and repeat the treacherous death scene, but he also made the love potion superfluous; the lovers actually drank the potion, though they had fallen hopelessly in love beforehand.⁵¹ Though the poetical versions of Gottfried, Béroul, and Thomas had been revived before the mid-nineteenth century, some of the Victorian poets, especially Tennyson, turned to Malory for their inspiration.

Part of the magic and tragedy of the old tale is missing in their adaptations,⁵² but they felt free to render the story to fit their own tastes and times. Ultimately, the source of their inspiration is less significant than what they made of the legend itself.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

¹Joseph Wood Krutch, "Love--or the Life and Death of a Value," in The Modern Temper (1929; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1956), p. 69.

²Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 377-79, 386-90.

³*Ibid.*, p. 341.

⁴Noel Gilroy Annan, Leslie Stephen: His Thought and Character in Relation to His Time (London: McGibbon & Kee, 1951), p. 75.

⁵The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Cambridge Edition, ed. Ruth M. Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 255 (Bk. I, ll. 87-91).

⁶Otis Wheeler, "The Sacramental View of Love in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in Essays in Honor of Esmond Linworth Marilla, ed. Thomas Austin Kirby and William John Olive (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), pp. 343-44.

⁷"Guinevere," The Poetical Works of Tennyson, Cambridge Edition, ed. G. Robert Stange, 2nd ed. (1898; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 440 (ll. 471-73).

⁸Quotation from Time and Tide, Letter 10, in The Works of John Ruskin, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, XVIII (London: George Allen, 1905), 362. He refers to chivalry in "Of Queen's Gardens," Works, XVIII, 119-20.

⁹The Allegory of Love (1936; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 3, 9.

¹⁰Love in the Western World, trans. Montgomery Belgion, 2nd ed. (1940; rpt. New York: Pantheon, 1956), pp. 65-66, 79-81; quotation, p. 90.

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 1, 37-42.

¹²Love Declared: Essays on the Myths of Love, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Pantheon, 1963), p. 49.

¹³Love in the Western World, p. 276.

¹⁴A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspective (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 391-98.

¹⁵Allegory of Love, p. 20.

¹⁶Preface to Chaucer, pp. 395-96.

¹⁷Allegory of Love, pp. 2, 13-14.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 360.

¹⁹Houghton, pp. 353-81. I summarize from Houghton's extensive analysis and examples; the quotations dealing with Patmore are found on pp. 378-79.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 381-85.

²¹Ibid., pp. 385-89.

²²Victorian England: Portrait of an Age, 2nd ed. (1936; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 74.

²³Ibid., p. 75.

²⁴"Science, Religion, and the Critical Mind," in 1859: Entering an Age of Crisis, ed. Philip Appleman, William A. Madden, Michael Wolff (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1959), p. 32.

²⁵Richard D. Altick, Victorian People and Ideas (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 235.

²⁶Ibid., p. 221.

²⁷Wheeler, pp. 352-53.

²⁸The Religion of Nature (London: Lindsey, 1957), p. 27.

²⁹Ibid., p. 20.

³⁰Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros, trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), pp. 175-80; de Rougemont, Love in the Western World, pp. 61-66.

³¹Nygren, pp. 303-10.

³²Houghton, p. 392.

³³Quoted from Masao Miyoshi, The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 227.

³⁴"The Burden of the Artist," 1859: Entering an Age of Crisis, ed. Appleman et. al. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1959), p. 264.

³⁵Altick, pp. 291-98.

³⁶Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Victorian Temper (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 175. See also Robert L. Peters, "Swinburne and the Moral Design of Art," Victorian Poetry, 2 (1964), 139-54.

³⁷Altick, pp. 290-93.

³⁸Robert L. Peters, ed., "Introductory Notes," Victorians on Literature and Art (New York: Appleton, 1961), p. 7.

³⁹Buckley, p. 224.

⁴⁰Lionel Stevenson, Darwin Among the Poets (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), p. 291.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 261.

⁴²C. G. Jung, "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious," The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, ed. Sir Herbert Read et. al., trans. R. F. C. Hull, IX, Pt. 1 (New York: Pantheon, 1953), 18-19.

⁴³The Enchafed Flood or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea (New York: Random House, 1950), pp. 13-14.

⁴⁴Joseph Bédier, The Romance of Tristan and Iseult, trans. Hilaire Belloc and Paul Rosenfeld (1945; rpt. New York: Vintage-Knopf, 1965); James Douglas Bruce, The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: From the Beginnings Down to the Year 1300, 2nd ed. (1928; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1958), I, 166-71; Roger Sherman Loomis, The Development of Arthurian Romance (New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 74-78.

⁴⁵Helaine Newstead, "The Origin and Growth of the Tristan Legend," Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 122-33. This volume is hereafter cited as ALMA. See also Bruce, I, 171-91; Loomis, Development of Arthurian Romance, pp. 79-82. In a more recent study, Sigmund Eisner, The Tristan Legend: A Study in Sources (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969), disagrees with these conclusions; he believes the Drustansaga, as he calls and reconstructs it, was first composed in the seventh century by one literate author, probably a monk associated with a North British monastery.

⁴⁶Frederick Whitehead, "The Early Tristan Poems," ALMA, pp. 136-38; Bruce, II, 152-65.

⁴⁷Whitehead, ALMA, pp. 134-44; Loomis, Development of Arthurian Romance, pp. 82-86; Bruce, I, 157-59.

⁴⁸W. T. H. Jackson, "Gottfried von Strassburg," ALMA, pp. 145-56.

⁴⁹Loomis, Development of Arthurian Romance, p. 87.

⁵⁰Eugène Vinaver, "The Prose Tristan," ALMA, pp. 337-47.

⁵¹Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte Darthur, ed. with introd. Sir Edward Strachey (1868; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1925), pp. 161-348. See also Margaret J. C. Reid, The Arthurian Legend: Comparison of Treatment in Modern and Mediaeval Literature (1938; rpt. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), pp. 191-203. As is often pointed out, Malory get so bogged down in the Tristan material that he finally throws it over altogether; the glance at the death scene in ch. xii of Book XIX (seven Books later) seems a mere afterthought.

⁵²Vinaver, "The Prose Tristan," ALMA, pp. 346-47.

CHAPTER II

THE MORAL APPROACH TO TRISTAN:

ARNOLD AND TENNYSON

With the publication of "Tristram and Iseult" in 1852, Matthew Arnold introduced the Tristan legend to Victorian England. Sir Walter Scott had edited and concluded the Middle English Sir Tristrem in 1804, but few nineteenth-century readers were familiar with the tale; in fact, many readers were so confused by Arnold's indirect method of handling the story that James Anthony Froude proposed that he preface the 1853 edition with a summary from Dunlop's History of Fiction.¹ Arnold obliged. And for the first time, readers could easily follow the outline of "Tristram and Iseult."

The summary, however, is almost as significant for what it omits as what it includes; there is no mention of either the sails episode or Iseult of Brittany's lie, both of which Dunlop related.² Arnold's major source, Theodore de la Villemarqué's "Les poèmes gallois et les romans de la Table-Ronde" in the 1841 Revue de Paris, does not mention the sails but states that Iseult of Brittany told Tristan that Queen Iseult refused to come to Brittany; Tristan consequently dies of "chagrin" because of the lie.³ Because he rejects this ending altogether and makes Iseult of Brittany the heroine of his poem, Arnold omits from the 1853 summary any suggestion of her treachery. Further, Malory's Le Morte Darthur, which Arnold says he consulted after

forming the poem in his mind,⁴ devotes scarcely any attention to Iseult of the White Hands. The details which La Villemarqué includes and the character Malory merely glances at point up, then, the most salient feature of Arnold's poem: the special attention to, the sympathy directed toward, Iseult of the White Hands.

Seven years later, in 1859, Wagner, following Gottfried's version, completed his opera Tristan und Isolde, though it was not produced until 1865. Whereas Arnold made Iseult of Brittany a major character, Wagner dismissed her as altogether extraneous to the high passion of Tristan and Queen Iseult. When Tennyson published "The Last Tournament" in 1871, he was aware of Arnold's poem but apparently knew nothing of Wagner's Tristan. Even if he had known the opera (and there is no evidence that he did), it is unlikely that he could have used it in any way, for his larger purpose in the Idylls--to show the corruption and moral decay attendant upon adultery and related sins--determined his treatment of the legend. Malory better suited that purpose, and Tennyson follows him but debases Tristan and Queen Iseult, making them little more than brutes and advocates of free love. He stresses their animalism in Mark's brutal slaying of Tristan, an incident taken directly from Malory. Unlike Arnold, Tennyson keeps Iseult of the White Hands in the background; never appearing in person, she emerges as a representative of domestic affection and as an important contrast to Tristan.

Neither Arnold nor Tennyson, then, treats the episode of the sails and Iseult of Brittany's treachery. Arnold's exaltation of her necessitates the omission, whereas Tennyson's larger purpose in the Idylls determines his manner of concluding the Tristan story. Neither celebrates passionate love as Wagner does; in fact, both distrust and condemn such love. Arnold is undoubtedly more objective than Tennyson in treating the subject of passion, but his poem creates a "moral impression" in its rejection of passionate love. Tennyson, on the other hand, is overtly didactic in his condemnation of sexual passion. Arnold, by focusing on Iseult of Brittany as a widow and mother, and Tennyson, by illustrating the destructive effects of sensuality, betray a concern for social codes which the original legend does not display. As a result of their concentration upon the necessity of social order, neither poet develops extensively the metaphor of the sea as freedom or fate or passion; but their limited use of the sea reveals it to be primarily symbolic of passion and therefore dangerous to social and spiritual health. A closer look at each poem and its background will demonstrate the poets' attitudes toward love.

Arnold's "Tristram and Iseult"

Between 1848, the year he first visited Thun, and 1852, the year he published "Tristram and Iseult," Arnold experienced two crises, one personal, one literary. Whether or not he met

the shadowy French girl, Marguerite, on the 1848 trip is unclear, but most scholars today are inclined to agree that he probably did.⁵ A letter to Clough, dated September 29, is often cited as evidence: "Tomorrow I repass the Gemmi and get to Thun: linger one day at the Hotel Bellevue for the sake of the blue eyes of one of its inmates" (LC, p. 91). A year later, in September 1849, he again writes to Clough and includes several lines of a poem he later called "Parting," which deals with Marguerite (LC, p. 110). Further external evidence is lacking, especially since the diaries of 1848-1850 are missing,⁶ but internal evidence in the group of poems called "Switzerland" indicates that Arnold was both attracted to and repelled by the sensuousness, the passion, Marguerite represented. This sequence of poems Arnold arranged and re-arranged, omitting some, including others, and finally in 1877 settling on seven, six of which were conceived in 1849-1850 and five of which were published in 1852. Except for "The Terrace at Berne," written in 1859, ten years after his departure from Marguerite, the sequence treats the theme of love, particularly his fascination for the French girl; it also shows, in poems such as "Parting" and "A Farewell," his inability to respond to her, his fear that she might be too frivolous, and his desire for quiet and peace rather than the carefree life she seems to lead. A. Dwight Culler says of the sequence: "Briefly, it is the story of a man who for one delicious moment enjoys a fresh and rapturous love, is

then plunged into a sea of passion, suffering, and loss, and finally, through deepened self-understanding, moves into the solitude and calm that are properly his."⁷ Whether from fear of relaxing his moral strictures or from sheer incompatibility, Arnold finally rejects Marguerite and the passionate love she represents for Frances Lucy Wightman, a quieter, more domestic woman whom he married in 1851. There can be little doubt, however, that the Marguerite experience caused him much anxiety and forced him to define his attitude toward love; the ambivalence in the poems, that is, the attraction and repulsion of each lover for the other, adds vitality to the poems but compels Arnold to resolve the issue in his personal life.⁸

During the same years he was undergoing another crisis, this one in artistic direction. In the mid-1840's he tended to favor a purely aesthetic approach to art. For instance, in a letter of 1845 to Clough, he remarks: "I know the strong minded writer will lose his self-knowledge and talk of his usefulness and imagine himself a Reformer, instead of an Exhibition" (LC, p. 59). Actually, as E. D. H. Johnson points out, Arnold's early poetry alternates between involvement in his times and detachment therefrom, but he often feels, especially in his letters to Clough, that the artist must create in isolation because the spirit of the age is "inimical to disinterested endeavor."⁹ And in a letter of February 1849 he comes very close to the aesthetic emphasis upon form over content, emphasizing "an absolute propriety--of form, as the

sole necessary of Poetry as such"; he continues, contrasting form and content:

I often think that even a slight gift of poetical expression which in a common person might have developed itself easily and naturally, is overlaid and crushed in a profound thinker so as to be of no use to him to express himself.--The trying to go into and to the bottom of an object instead of grouping objects is as fatal to the sensuousness of poetry as the mere painting, (for, in Poetry, this is not grouping) is to its airy and rapidly moving life. (LC, p. 99)

Such a position, if pursued, would doubtless have led him to the aesthetic doctrine of art-for-art's sake.¹⁰

But he could not maintain that poetic stance. Just one month later, in March 1849, he writes to Clough:

There are two offices of Poetry--one to add to one's store of thoughts and feelings--another to compose and elevate the mind by a sustained tone, numerous allusions, and a grand style. What other process is Milton's than this last, in Comus for instance. There is no fruitful analysis of character: but a great effect is produced. . . . Nay in Sophocles what is valuable is not so much his contributions to psychology and the anatomy of sentiment, as the grand moral effects produced by style. (LC, pp. 100-101)

Here Arnold is definitely aware that poetry may, and perhaps should, have a didactic function, and since it is his first extant acknowledgment of that position, it indicates that he is beginning to experience doubts about his aesthetic inclinations.¹¹ Two letters of 1852 suggest that the tension has been resolved in favor of the didactic. In June, he tells Clough, ". . . the gifted have astonished and delighted the world, but not trained or inspired or in any real way changed it--and the world might do worse than to dismiss too high pretensions,

and settle down on what it can see and handle and appreciate" (LC, p. 123). And in October, the same month as the publication of Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems (which contains "Tristram"), he asserts: ". . . modern poetry can only subsist by its contents: by becoming a complete magister vitae as the poetry of the ancients did; by including, as theirs did, religion with poetry, instead of existing as poetry only, and leaving religious wants to be supplied by the Christian religion, as a power existing independent of the poetical power (LC, p. 124). The shift in artistic intention is explicit--away from form and toward content.

If there are any doubts left concerning the function of the artist, they are virtually resolved in the "Preface" of 1853, the manifesto to which his struggles had been leading him. The primary concern here is with thematic content, for the poet must "select an excellent action," one which appeals "to the great primary human affections." Form and expression (which he calls the "grand style") are indeed important but only as they contribute to the total effect of a poem; they must remain subordinate to the idea, never calling attention to themselves. Content and form together should lead to one effect: "unity and profoundness of moral impression."¹² Arnold's progression from the aesthetic slant to the moral completes itself with this document. And it is notable that while he rejects Empedocles because it fails to treat "an excellent action" and to create a "moral impression," he retains "Tristram,"

though the excellence of the action may be as questionable as that in Empedocles.

Such is the personal and literary background out of which "Tristram and Iseult" sprang. It was on one of the visits to Thun, most likely in 1849, that Arnold discovered the La Villemarqué article,¹³ and it is not unlikely that he found in this legend of doomed love a situation somewhat similar to the hopelessness of his and Marguerite's affair. If his personal experience provided the initial interest in the tale, however, his imagination had to shape the material, to re-mold the story for modern tastes. And to do that, he had to determine exactly what his poem should do. Should it celebrate passion or domesticity? Should the artist take a disinterested stance, merely observing both types of love but favoring neither? His treatment of Iseult of Brittany and his technique of the narrator go far toward answering these questions.

Anyone familiar with the original legend is immediately struck by the disproportionate emphasis on Iseult of Brittany in Arnold's poem. She occupies, it is true, a critical position in the last part of Tristram's life in the original versions; but the real story is Tristram's and Queen Iseult's, especially as their love conflicts with their obligations to King Mark. In Arnold, the young wife is the central character, and the conflict is between her and the two passionate lovers, between, that is, two types of love, domestic and illicit. The titles of the poem and its three parts are instructive. "Tristram

and Iseult," the main title, is ambiguous in that "Iseult" refers exclusively to neither lover nor wife but generally to both; perhaps the two Iseults are really "different aspects of the same personality," or woman in general.¹⁴ Part I, "Tristram," centers on the dying knight and his delirious visions of Iseult of Ireland, while the young wife stands by; Part II, "Iseult of Ireland," focuses on the death of the lovers in the absence of the young wife; Part III, "Iseult of Brittany," occurs a year later and belongs entirely to the widowed Iseult.

The contrast between the two Iseults is quickly established in Part I. Iseult of Brittany, described in tones of white, is the epitome of "fragile loveliness": "sunk and pale," "a snowdrop by the sea," the "sweetest Christian soul alive" (ll. 48-54). Iseult of Ireland is "fair" and "proud" (ll. 57-58), "petulant" and "imperious" (ll. 120, 124). Together, they are the "two Iseults who did sway / Each her hour of Tristram's day; / But one possessed his waning time, / The other his resplendent prime" (ll. 68-71).

Although Arnold makes Iseult of Brittany's presence felt in Part I, he concentrates primarily on erotic love, from which Tristram suffers, in order to show the effects of passion on its victims. In his fevered dreams Tristram recalls the voyage from Ireland when he and Iseult of Ireland drank "that spiced magic draught" (ll. 64, 94-104), their attempts to engage in clandestine love at Tyntagel (ll. 161-69), his flight to fight with Arthur against the Romans (ll. 234-42), and his

attempts to find peace in the forest glades of Brittany (ll. 276-87). Of these dreams, only the first, recalled in terms of spring and sunshine, is actually pleasant; the knight and princess were then young and innocent, and their action of drinking the love potion Arnold presents as purely innocent and accidental. Afterward, however, their lips are "blanched" (l. 102). The succeeding dreams point up Tristram's unhappiness, his inability to find peace anywhere. In battle, he is absent-minded, thinking only of Iseult, and in the forest-chapel of Brittany he sees her face when he bends down to soothe his brow in the cool spring. Everywhere he is restless, tortured, driven by her image. And as he lies here in Brittany on a cold, stormy night, just before dying, his delirium and dreams testify to his mental torture--nowhere is peace possible except in death.

But just after the storm (the outward counterpart of Tristram's inner anguish) subsides and the moon appears, Iseult of Ireland enters. Part II presents Arnold's Liebestod. Iseult, herself humbled by time, still retains enough regal mien that Tristram addresses her as "haughty Queen" (l. 2), and even in his last moments, he cannot refrain from reproaching her for arriving late. When he calms down, he commands her to "Sit--sit by me! I will think, we've lived so / In the green wood, all our lives, alone" (ll. 35-36). Thus he reveals, even in his agonizing last hour, the power of passion to delude, for they have experienced none of that paradisiac bliss of the green wood or forest glade.¹⁵ And Iseult responds to his command by relating how her life, like his, has been restless, empty, how she has had to suffer silently

under the burden of being a queen (ll. 37-56). Arnold's purpose with the lovers--to show the debilitating effect of passion--is complete. Only death remains, and that follows quickly for both:

Tristram

Now to sail the seas of death I leave thee--
One last kiss upon the living shore!

Iseult

Tristram!--Tristram!--stay--receive me with thee!
Iseult leaves thee, Tristram! never more. (ll. 97-100)

Their death, as Stange notes, is a "release from passion not into it,"¹⁶ and the static scene of the dead Iseult stretched across the bed of Tristram suggests a Pre-Raphaelite painting.¹⁷

Most critics, whatever their perspective, see the first two parts of "Tristram" as a condemnation of passion.¹⁸ A more difficult problem of interpretation occurs with Iseult of Brittany, to whom Part III is devoted. Arnold has here (and in Part I) created for her a special ambiance, consisting of children and companions and quiet work. Her most overt action in the poem is the supervising of the children's play and telling them the story of Merlin and Vivian; she is, in short, a passive character, but a patient, loyal, and devoted widow and mother. But what does Arnold think of her?--that is the problem. He has the narrator ask:

And is she happy? Does she see unmoved
The days in which she might have lived and loved
Slip without bringing bliss slowly away,
One after one, to-morrow like to-day? (ll. 64-67)

And his (the narrator's) response emphasizes her pathetic situation: "Joy has not found her yet, nor ever will--. . . She

seems one dying in a mask of youth" (ll. 68, 75). Her routine, which consists of caring for the children, embroidering, praying, seems lifeless: ". . . and tomorrow'll be / Today's exact repeated effigy" (ll. 94-95). The few pleasures she enjoys include the children, her companions in the castle, the landscape, and old Breton tales (ll. 96-111). If Tristram's life was restless and tormented, hers seems totally placid, lacking vitality and color.

After painting this rather bleak picture, the narrator goes on in the most controversial passage of the poem:

Dear saints, it is not sorrow, as I hear,
 Not suffering, which shuts up eye and ear
 To all that has delighted them before . . .
 No, 'tis the gradual furnace of the world,
 In whose hot air our spirits are upcurled
 Until they crumble, or else grow like steel--
 Which kills in us the bloom, the youth, the spring--
 Which leaves the fierce necessity to feel,
 But takes away the power-- . . .
 This, or some tyrannous single thought, some fit
 Of passion, which subdues our souls to it,
 Till for its sake alone we live and move--
 Call it ambition, or remorse, or love-- . . .
 (ll. 112-14, 119-24; 127-30)

These lines seem to qualify the bleak situation of Iseult of Brittany, for the two things which rob man of his power to feel-- ceaseless, trivial, meaningless activities or "some tyrannous single thought"--do not apply to her; she is a victim of sorrow and suffering, it is true, but not a victim of those activities and passions which destroy feeling. Arnold's note in the Yale manuscript, which refers to the social whirl and the "continual dance of ever-changing objects," makes it abundantly clear that the "gradual furnace of the world" does not apply to her, though an occasional critic insists otherwise.¹⁹ The tendency to read

these lines as referring to the widowed Iseult is enhanced by the narrator's continued outburst, in which he sharply attacks only the "tyrannous single thought":

And yet, I swear, it angers me to see
How this fool passion gulls men potently;
Being in truth, but a diseased unrest,
And an unnatural overheat at best. (ll. 133-36)

That the whole passage (ll. 112-50) presents a problem was evident even to Arnold, for in the editions of 1853 and 1854 he omitted it altogether, probably feeling that he had not sufficiently dissociated the narrator from himself.²⁰

Therein lies the heart of the problem. The narrator, generally regarded as a Breton bard,²¹ functions as a device by which Arnold can distance himself from his subject, passionate and domestic love. Throughout the poem, the narrator merely describes or comments upon the action but never judges it until the passage in question. And he, too, distances the action by the tableaux or end-emblems of each part: in Part I, the device of the peaceful dreams of the children as a contrast to the feverish dreams of Tristram; in Part II, the Keatsian device of the arras, in which a work of art is made to comment on a scene from the real world (the death of the lovers); and in Part III, the tale of Merlin and Vivian, which is meant, in Arnold's words, "to relieve the poem" of the sadness of Iseult of Brittany's situation.²² These two devices, the narrator and the tableaux he is made to paint, form the basis of much criticism, and with good reason, for Arnold's success or failure with them largely determines the success or failure of the poem as a "disinterested creative

endeavor."

The first two tableaux create no real controversy, though commentators such as E. D. H. Johnson see the tapestry device (Part II) as detracting from the poem by shifting the reader's attention away from the dead lovers to the Huntsman in the tapestry;²³ others such as Fraser Nieman and G. Robert Stange praise it as transforming mutable passion into immutable art and emphasizing the ambiguities of "time and change, death and art."²⁴ The third tableau, like the whole of Part III (which is sometimes seen as a tableau-ending to Parts I and II), presents a stickier problem; the tale of Merlin and Vivian which Iseult of Brittany tells her children but which the narrator relates for the reader has baffled readers since publication of the poem. The tale is simple enough, portraying Vivian's entrapment and enchantment of the supposedly wise Merlin because "she was passing weary of his love" (l. 224). But what does the tale mean? What is its relation to the rest of the poem? Clough heard in it "a sort of faint musical mumble," while the reviewer at Fraser's protested that it was "not a child's tale . . . it is little but a picture . . . it has, we think, absolutely no business where it is."²⁵

Traditionally, critics have sought equivalences between Merlin and Vivian and the three major characters in the poem. For instance, Merlin, as a victim of passion, is generally compared to Tristram, but Tinker and Lowry see a relationship between Merlin and Iseult of Brittany: "The fate of Merlin is the counterpart of her own, for she, too, has been drawn into the charmed circle of a disastrous love, and its bondage endures."²⁶ Bonnerot and, more

recently, Allott take a biographical approach and read Merlin as Arnold and Vivian as Marguerite.²⁷ Mark Siegchrist, glossing the whole poem through Vivian as a personification of passion, finds the tale to be an indictment of Iseult of Brittany's implied and the narrator's explicit condemnation of passion; no one, not even the widowed Iseult, is free from the possible lure of passion, and to condemn it is futile.²⁸ J. L. Kendell, however, has detected a special relevance of the tale to the narrator; the inadequacy of Merlin's wisdom reflects the narrator's own inadequacy in his judgments of Tristram and Iseult of Ireland--both Merlin and the narrator, in other words, symbolize wisdom, but both, like the other characters, are fallible, are "helpless to cope with the mysterious ways of nature."²⁹ In fact, several recent commentators, in an effort to redeem the poem from the traditional charges of vagueness of incident and mismanagement of point of view, have focused on the narrator, seeing in him an objective, if inconsistent, persona. Robert A. Greenberg sees the narrator as the artist inside the poem, whose purpose is "to transform by shaping or grouping according to his own vision."³⁰ To M. G. Sundell he is merely an actor who seeks an external ordering of his vision through the oration, in contrast to Tristram, who sought an internal ordering through love and dreams; and because common sense and logic have nothing to do with love, the narrator's oration proves inadequate.³¹

Whatever the meaning of the Merlin-Vivian tale, it relates directly to the idea of passion, and the narrator is intricately involved in Arnold's final assessment of that emotion. Perhaps

the safest course in regard to the Merlin legend is to view it, as Howard W. Fulweiler does, from the points of view of Iseult of Brittany, the narrator, and Arnold; in that case, Iseult identifies with Merlin as having been entrapped by another (Tristram), the narrator equates Merlin and Tristram as slaves of passion, and Arnold identifies Vivian and Merlin with Marguerite and himself although he, unlike Merlin, escaped. Symbolically, Fulweiler feels, Merlin's sleep represents Arnold's loss of faith in the "creative power of poetry."³² Finally, these varied interpretations point up two things: the ambiguity of the poem and the apparent failure of Arnold to clarify what he felt about passionate and domestic love. I believe, however, that Arnold's device of the narrator, supported by the foregoing account of his personal and literary crises, betrays his true intentions.

To distance oneself from the content of his art through a narrator is an old and honored device. Such a technique allows for disinterestedness, which J. Hillis Miller notes is another name for irony.³³ One only has to recall Chaucer's use of this technique in The Canterbury Tales to realize its effectiveness; there, Chaucer the pilgrim is always distinguishable from Chaucer the poet so that what the pilgrim approves the poet often mocks. The trouble with Arnold's poem, however, is that the device breaks down when the narrator's mask collapses in his impassioned outburst in Part III (ll. 112-50). Elsewhere in the poem the device succeeds as the narrator never condemns or judges the

action, but here there is no attempt to remain disinterested. When the narrator says that only two things--the "gradual furnace of the world" and "some tyrannous single thought"--rob man of his power to feel, and when he particularly condemns passion, the reader feels that Arnold is speaking to him directly, for nothing in the poem has prepared him for such an outburst.

Technically, such dropping of a mask need not mean artistic failure. Swift, for instance, near the end of "A Modest Proposal," drops his mask long enough to outline the measures he would really like to see instituted among the Irish, but he can utter these in tones as dispassionate as the cannibalism he proposes. The difference lies in management of tone. Arnold, perhaps because the subject is too personal, cannot remain dispassionate, cannot control the tone of "Tristram." That is probably why he omitted the passage in the 1853 and 1854 editions of the poem. But his failure to maintain the ironic mask has, ironically perhaps, two advantages for the reader; it allows him to discern Arnold's attitudes toward Iseult of Brittany and toward art generally.

Though the widowed Iseult is not a model of happiness, she emerges as more desirable than Iseult of Ireland. Her life may be placid, but her stoic passivity is preferable to "the tyrannous single thought" which torments her rival. Nor is she a victim of the dizzy spectacle of trivial, meaningless activity. Perhaps in her suffering she is too much the Victorian housewife, but she does possess life and compassion for others. If she is unattractive to modern readers in her simple acceptance of sorrow,

one must remember that Iseult of Ireland could not find joy either, except in death. There seems to be no joy for any of the major characters, but of the two possibilities of existence--passion and calm--they offer, Arnold seems to prefer the calm of Iseult of Brittany, to prefer, as Stange says, life and wise action over death.³⁴ When he began writing the poem, he apparently did not know which he preferred; but by the time he completed it he knew the answer, for he gave Iseult of Brittany the calmer, maturer section of the poem, "not only the last word but the best."³⁵ Because he could never reconcile opposites,³⁶ in this case fuse an ideal love out of passion and domesticity, he was forced to choose one or the other, in this poem domestic love. Finally, it must be recalled that while he was shaping the poem he met and married Frances Wightman; he knew what passion meant from his experience with Marguerite, but he chose her opposite to marry.

For the reader, however, the major impression left by the narrator's dropping the mask is a moral one. Whereas the preference for Iseult of Brittany is mainly implied, the condemnation of passionate love is explicit (ll. 133-42), throwing over the poem a moral atmosphere. From the many changes in the 1853 version of "Tristram," it is obvious, according to E. D. H. Johnson, that Arnold was shaping the poem at the same time that he was working on the "Preface" of 1853;³⁷ that document clearly asserts that poetry should create a "moral impression." To be sure, Arnold dropped the controversial

passage in 1853 and 1854, but his reinserting it in 1857 is ample evidence that he considered it vital to the poem. And it should be added that he made minor revisions in the poem as late as 1877 but never again omitted the passage. In all likelihood, as he became more and more convinced that poetry should be didactic, he felt the need of the lines.

Arnold's use of the sea in "Tristram" further supports his moral view of love. As is often pointed out, particularly by Culler, the sea functions as a major symbol in Arnold's poetry. Most often, it is the "Wide-Glimmering Sea," symbolic of peace and calm, the sea into which the "River of Life or Time" flows; but occasionally it is the "Sea of Life," comparable to the "Darkling Plain," symbolic of suffering and alienation.³⁸ It is the second of these ideas which Arnold develops, though not extensively, in "Tristram"; the sea here is "characterized by the storms of passion which blow across it."³⁹ Not only in the opening lines, where the storm adds to the ferocity of the Atlantic, but throughout the poem, the sea functions as an image of passion and danger. Tristram gazes toward the stormy sea (I, 11), waiting for Queen Iseult's arrival, and the narrator asks if the "bleak sea-gale" (I, 33) has perhaps caused the paleness of Iseult of Brittany. Symbolically, both lines are significant, for the very passion which still motivates Tristram has automatically affected the people around him, especially his wife. Later, the narrator says Tristram's "closed eye doth sweep / O'er some fair unwintry sea, / Not this fierce Atlantic

deep" (I, 90-92). These lines establish the delusive and destructive qualities of passion: like the sea, passion appears fair but only in Tristram's dreams; in reality, it becomes fierce and treacherous (I, 102-03) and threatens to destroy its victims.

A further identification of sea (or water) with passion possibly occurs in the Jungian sense of water as the symbol of "the fluid of the instinct . . . carnality heavy with passion." From the moment they drank "that spiced magic draught, / Which since then for ever rolls / Through their blood" (I, 64-66), Tristram and Iseult have been as restless as the ocean in their desire and hunger for each other. Tristram, in particular, "with a fire in his brain" wanders "o'er the stormy main" (I, 187-88), finding comfort and calm nowhere. His attempts to forget himself in the Arthurian wars (I, 236-42) and the forest glades of Brittany (I, 276-86) prove futile, for always the image of Queen Iseult pursues him. In short, the sea seems to be his natural element, for he can nowhere find in the course of his manic wanderings any satisfaction of his desires, whether in Tynstagel, Rome, or Brittany. Ordinary activities provide no relief for him--or Iseult (II, 37-52). They are alienated from society, which seems to them hostile, but worse, they are alienated from themselves, victims not only of passion but of the instability and restlessness which passion produces. Their condition, the incessant, instinctual desire for each other and the hopelessness of ever really uniting, recalls "the unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea" (l. 24) of "To Marguerite--Continued." Peace and fulfillment are possible only in death, and it is significant that Tristram

refers to death as a final voyage: "Now to sail the seas of death I leave thee" (II, 97). Iseult joins him on that final journey (II, 99-100), the only one in which their passion can truly unite them.

In contrast to the lovers, Iseult of Brittany can find comfort in the world. Society, at least that of her children and servants, provides for her the very means of being. If the sea (passion) seemed Tristram's element, the land (society) operates in the same manner for her; indeed, the stationary quality of her portrait reinforces this idea. She enjoys walking along the seashore and watching the distant sails (III, 104-05), actions which reveal a certain fascination with the sea, but she never ventures out upon it. Instead, she concerns herself with social and domestic cares, primarily the protection of her children. When she supervises their play and calls them to hear the tale of Merlin and Vivian, the action occurs "in a green circular hollow of the heath" (III, 7), away from the sea and protected by a grassy embankment. The security of the "cirque" suggests the security and protection of the family against the threats of passion, the sea, the ravages of which she knows only too well. In addition, her lamp becomes a "star," a lighthouse for the fishermen who must toil in the dark Atlantic (III, 79-81). Her life, calm and lonely as it may be, suggests, then, the necessity of order, of social responsibilities; and insofar as she is the innocent victim of others' passions, it suggests that passion plays havoc not only with those who yield to it but to the innocent

as well.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that even if he prefers Iseult of Brittany to the passionate lovers, Arnold evinces a fascination with passion. Except for his dropping of the narrator's mask, he manages a fairly objective dramatization of both domestic and passionate love. He chooses, as Culler asserts,⁴⁰ and his choice of the widowed Iseult gives a moral slant to the poem. Nonetheless, he avoids the heavy didacticism of Tennyson in "The Last Tournament," a poem which Bonnerot says travesties the legend "en un conte moral."⁴¹

Tennyson's "The Last Tournament"

For the reader who comes to "The Last Tournament" with a wide knowledge of the Tristan legend but with a scant awareness of Tennyson's design in the Idylls, Bonnerot's judgment is fair enough. It reveals the same bias that some of the early commentators expressed. Two examples will suffice. Swinburne considered the legend "debased" and "degraded" in Tennyson's poem,⁴² while the reviewer at the London Quarterly launched into diatribe:

Concerning the fine old romance of Tristram, and the inadequacy of such a treatment as the present to render the tragedy of the romance in its integrity, . . . we, with the reading world at large, must be content still to wait for the English version of Tristram . . . Whatever be the destinies of the Tristram romance in the hands /Swinburne's/ now reshaping it, let us hope, at all events, that the chief character may not be so depressed from all standards of humanity as he is in this latest book of the Laureate's . . . a commonplace man, of mere brute strength.⁴³

What all of these opinions ignore is Tennyson's larger purpose in the Idylls. Since "The Last Tournament" is only one idyll, and since the Idylls as a complete work, if it is unified, must have a shaping design and controlling purpose, any fair evaluation of Tennyson's "Tristram" must first consider the poem as a whole.

When "The Last Tournament" was published in 1871, Tennyson had already been working on the Idylls for nearly forty years, and by this time the design of the Idylls was largely complete. But because he later added "Gareth and Lynette" (1872) and "Balin and Balan" (1885) and divided "Enid" into two idylls (1886), one must, to be fair to the London Quarterly, point out that the reviewer lacked the advantage of examining the complete Idylls. Furthermore, the nineteenth-century reader, having been exposed to the Idylls in a piecemeal fashion, had the problem of adjusting to Tennyson's rearrangements of the various idylls. "Balin and Balan," for example, was the twelfth (and last) idyll composed, but was placed fifth in the completed poem. Such rearrangements, as Kathleen Tillotson points out, proved something of a handicap to readers trying to discover Tennyson's ultimate design.⁴⁴ Still, the general drift of the Idylls was apparent to most readers by 1871. Two further reviews of "The Last Tournament" establish quite clearly what the Victorians regarded as Tennyson's design and purpose in the Idylls. T. H. L. Leary, in The Gentleman's Magazine, writes: "King Arthur, and his sublime effort to regenerate society by putting down all that is base or mean, and lifting up all that is pure--is the centre and circumference of this epic circle."⁴⁵ The reviewer for the Contemporary Review

says that "the whole series of poems as pictures is gradually transforming itself into a moral series . . . with a significance far greater than any aesthetical one . . ."; he further characterizes the Idylls as following the great canon of "'Art for Man's sake'" rather than the little canon "'Art for Art's sake'" and praises Tennyson for opposing the "gospel of the 'fleshly school'" by making Arthur, the ideal man, an "imitation of Christ."⁴⁶

Not everyone, of course, was so effusive as to believe Arthur an imitation of Christ. Swinburne, for instance, was fond of referring to the poem as "the Morte d'Albert."⁴⁷ But the moral view of the Idylls has largely prevailed even to the present and has often militated against a just evaluation of the poem because of twentieth-century aesthetic standards. Between the World Wars the idea of two Tennysons, the earlier aesthetic poet and the later moralizing Laureate, took hold in critical circles. T. S. Eliot furnishes but one example; in his essay on In Memoriam, he declares that "Tennyson seems to have reached the end of his spiritual development with In Memoriam," that afterward he "turned aside from the journey through the dark night, to become the surface flatterer of his own time."⁴⁸ Few today would deny that the Idylls has, at least outwardly, a moral purpose; but recent critics, beginning with E. D. H. Johnson in 1952, have discovered that the ostensible moral purpose merely masks a private vision. Through such devices as dreams, madness, visions, and quests, Tennyson betrays "interior imaginative

resources" rather uneasily yoked to, if not in conflict with, his exterior purposes.⁴⁹ Today the critical esteem in which the Idylls is held seems to justify Morse Peckham's remark that Tennyson "wanted success, and he wanted financial success, and he got both; he did not sell out."⁵⁰ This should not, however, imply agreement on the Idylls as a work of art. Valerie Pitt and Christopher Ricks see the poem as a failure on the whole; John Rosenberg, on the other hand, declares it to be "one of the four or five indisputably great poems in our language."⁵¹

However one regards the design and purpose and Tennyson's consequent success or failure in the Idylls, it is still best to begin with the poet's own comments, both inside and outside the poem. In the "Epilogue," added in 1873, he makes explicit what he intended in the Idylls; he calls the poem "this old imperfect tale, / New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul, / Ideal manhood closed in real man."⁵² Despite the fact that these lines are addressed to the Queen and therefore strike some readers as suspect, they square with other remarks of the Laureate. Hallam Tennyson records that his father looked upon the Idylls as "'the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the tableland of life, and its struggles and performances. It is not the history of one man or of one generation but of a whole cycle of generations.'"⁵³ And Charles Tennyson notes the poet's intention: "'I tried in my "Idylls" to teach men the need of the ideal.'"⁵⁴ Taken together, these remarks emphasize Tennyson's belief in the possibility of achieving ideal

manhood and, by extension, an ideal society, grounded in faith and based on order, respect, and love. The difficulty of realizing such an ideal occurs in the war of "Sense" and "Soul," a contest apparently won by the senses because of "one sin." Arthur himself designates that sin as adultery in his scourge of Guinevere:

Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot;
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;
Then others, following these my mightiest knights,
And drawing foul ensample from fair names,
Sinn'd also, till the loathsome opposite
Of all my heart had destined did obtain,
And all thro' thee! . . . ("Guinevere," ll. 484-90)

For modern readers, this is the most unpleasant and unconvincing part of the Idylls, and recent critics, seeking other causes for the breakup of the Round Table, have found in Arthur a very eligible source. In general, he is regarded as too idealistic and therefore blind to the realities around him, a victim of the noble transcendental illusion that he can redeem the world.⁵⁵ Certainly, it is difficult to adapt the idea of "Sense at war with Soul" to any meaningful allegorical interpretation (which that phrase seems to suggest). On one hand, sense and soul must be joined as Arthur acknowledges when he seeks Guinevere in marriage: ". . . for saving I be join'd / To her that is the fairest under heaven, / I seem as nothing in the mighty world, / And cannot will my will nor work my work" ("Coming of Arthur," ll. 83-86); in this case, soul (Arthur) lifts sense (Guinevere) above "this land of beasts" (l. 78). On the other hand, insofar as the image implies actual warfare, Arthur and Guinevere express

a bitter and irreconcilable conflict, because soul attempts to extricate itself from sense.⁵⁶

For any analysis of "The Last Tournament," however, Arthur's accusation of Guinevere is significant inasmuch as it denotes Tennyson's intention in the Tristram idyll. To repeat, Guinevere's sin came first and was followed by that of Tristram and Isolt; further, Lancelot and Tristram were Arthur's "mightiest knights." Obviously, Tennyson was aware of Tristram's higher stature in Malory, but he debases the knight in order to show that Guinevere's adultery affects not only herself, Arthur, and Lancelot but the whole kingdom. Tristram's sin is merely the first ripple in an ever-widening circle of corruption issuing from the very heart of Camelot. Indeed, from one point of view, "The Last Tournament" resembles all the idylls (except "The Coming of Arthur" and "The Passing of Arthur") in that desire--generally sexual desire--triggers the basic action; in only one, "Gareth and Lynette," does "desire fully accord with duty."⁵⁷ Viewed in this manner, the Idylls can be interpreted as love stories, in which Arthur, the representative of Agape, is sent into the world to redeem man.⁵⁸

There is little evidence of Agape, however, in "The Last Tournament"; instead, the poem focuses on the disintegration of Arthur's kingdom, a process caused by erotic, passionate love and symbolized by the autumnal--almost funereal--imagery. The day of the tournament "Brake with a wet wind blowing" (l. 137); "The sudden trumpet sounded as in a dream / To ears

but half-awaked, then one low roll / Of autumn thunder, and the jousts began; / And ever the wind blew, and yellowing leaf, / And gloom and gleam, and shower and shorn plume / Went down it" (ll. 151-56). Into this scene rides Tristram, unannounced, and wins the ruby carcanet for Queen Isolt. The tournament, called "The Tournament of Dead Innocence" in memory of the death of an innocent child, proves ironically to be the death of all innocence: Lancelot, having usurped Arthur's place in Guinevere's heart, presides over the tournament in Arthur's absence and watches without protesting as all the laws are broken (ll. 160-61); Tristram, the "purest" of the knights, wins the necklace for the "purest" maid (ll. 49-50, 192) and afterwards insults the ladies in the gallery (ll. 207-09); the spectators largely approve, as evidenced by the laughter and remark of one "smartly" lady: "Praise the patient saints, / Our one white day of Innocence hath past, / Tho' somewhat draggled at the skirt" (ll. 217-19). All courtesy is indeed dead, as the "wan day" goes "glooming down in wet and weariness" (ll. 214-15). The next morning Dagonet, the fool, "High over all the yellowing autumn-tide, / Danced like a wither'd leaf before the hall" (ll. 241-42; also ll. 3-4). In the succeeding interview between Dagonet and Tristram, Tristram actually proves the "wither'd leaf," the false knight; not only does he make "broken music" with his bride, Isolt of Brittany, and break "Arthur's music" (ll. 264-66), but he can no longer even perceive the ideal of the kingdom, Arthur's "star," which "makes a silent music up in heaven" (ll. 347-49). Finally, after

Tristram has gone to his death at the hands of Mark, and the young knights have brutally murdered the Red Knight, Arthur returns to Camelot, "All in a death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom" (l. 750), only to find Guinevere gone and the fool alone faithful. The kingdom is in ruins, all innocence, all chivalry dead; winter has set in.

Tennyson's narrative method reflects this disintegration and disruption. The action moves backward and forward in both time and space from Camelot to the Red Knight's mock Round Table in the North to Lyonesse and back to Camelot, through dreams of the past, lawless acts of the present, and premonitions of the future.⁵⁹ At the present point in time, Tristram is not, of course, the only corrupt, disloyal member of the Round Table; but he is the most vivid in his defiance, and his actions image the general disintegration. Unable either to possess the Isolt he loves or to love the Isolt he possesses, he epitomizes aimlessness. Having broken his vow "To love one maiden only, cleave to her" ("Guinevere," l. 472), he has no purpose except to satisfy his momentary desires. He seems determined enough to win the necklace for Queen Isolt, but that is merely a means to an end, to regain her favor and possess her bodily. His dream of the two Isolts mirrors his indirection:

He seem'd to pace the strand of Brittany
Between Isolt of Britain and his bride,
And show'd them both the ruby-chain, and both
Began to struggle for it, till his queen
Graspt it so hard that all her hand was red.
Then cried the Breton, 'Look, her hand is red!
These be no rubies, this is frozen blood,
And melts within her hand--her hand is hot

With ill desires, but this I gave thee, look,
Is all as cool and white as any flower.' (ll. 406-15)

Subconsciously, at least, he is pulled both ways. Consciously, he chooses Isolt of Britain, for he is "immersed in the flux of the present," achieving definition, if at all, through his "ever-shifting experience."⁶⁰

If Tristram experiences a subconscious tension, however, he never expresses any remorse or guilt for his conscious actions. This, more than anything else, discriminates him from Lancelot and Guinevere, whose terrible burden of guilt allows them to repent and to achieve redemption.⁶¹ In this idyll, Lancelot yearns "to shake / The burthen off his heart in one full shock / With Tristram to the death" (ll. 179-81) and taunts Tristram with "Hast thou won? / Art thou the purest, brother?" (ll. 191-92). Tristram's just rebuke lessens neither his own transgressions nor Lancelot's implied guilt. Guinevere likewise experiences guilt: distraught with the day's events, she disperses the evening revelers and retires to her bower, where "in her bosom pain was lord" (l. 239). In short, the Tristram-Isolt-Mark triangle singularly lacks any of the sympathetic qualities of the triangle it parallels and parodies, Arthur-Guinevere-Lancelot.

The adulterous parallel is obvious, involving in both cases a king, his queen, and her lover. But Tennyson firmly subordinates Mark-Isolt-Tristram triangle to the other through the use of bestial imagery and the emphasis on destructiveness; he recalls the high romance of Tristram and Isolt only to parody the more tragic love of Lancelot and Guinevere.⁶² Arthur's first

premonition of the eventual disaster in Camelot has special significance for Tristram; before he leaves the tournament in the hands of his chief knight, he asks Lancelot:

Or have I dream'd the bearing of our knights
Tells of a manhood ever less and lower?
Or whence this fear lest this my realm, uprear'd
By noble deeds at one with noble vows,
From flat confusion and brute violences,
Reel back into the beast, and be no more? (ll. 120-25)

From the beginning Tristram has been associated with the "natural," the bestial; his armor, "all in forest green," displays a "hundred tiny silver deer" and his shield a spear (ll. 170-73). He speaks in animal imagery; when Lancelot gives him the carcanet, he asks: "Ay, but wherefore toss me this / Like a dry bone cast to some hungry hound?" (ll. 195-96); later, he refers to Dagonet as "swine" and as having "asses' ears" (ll. 273, 304, 310). On his way to Tintagil he exhibits the keenness and alertness of an animal, but it is Isolt, in a moment of pique, who equates him with the beasts:

But thou, thro' ever harrying thy wild beasts--
Save that to touch a harp, tilt with a lance
Becomes thee well--art grown wild beast thyself.
(ll. 630-32)

Mark, however, proves even more savage and destructive. Lurking always in the background, the sinister, craven king steals "Catlike thro' his own castle" (l. 514) and steals "behind one in the dark" (l. 613); except for fear of Tristram, he would have, Isolt says, "Scratched, bitten, blinded, marr'd me somehow" (l. 524). When he makes his one brief appearance in the idyll, he mutters the phrase which defines him, "Mark's way," and from behind cleaves Tristram "thro' the brain" (l. 748). Boyd

Litzinger sums up the outcome perfectly: "In light of the Arthurian dream, Tristram has 'reel'd back into the beast,' and has, ironically, to die at the hands of Mark, the still more savage beast."⁶³

Such treatment of Tristram seems harsh, but it is Tennyson's incorporation of the romance into a larger body of Arthurian material that sets his account of the lovers apart from the other Victorian versions. Though one can argue that he need not have debased Tristram so much, it is difficult to see exactly how he would have subordinated the Tristram story to Lancelot's without some form of debasement. Malory, it is true, subordinates Tristram to Lancelot without debasing him, but he also grows so weary of the Tristram story that he finally throws it over altogether, merely alluding several books later to the manner of Tristram's death. Tennyson is not only right in subordinating the Tristram story, but he also has a much clearer purpose in doing so than Malory has.

Despite this major difference from other modern versions, Tennyson's basic subject is the same sin--adultery--that motivates the original legend. Unlike Arnold and most writers except Wagner, he constitutes the triangle to include Mark and omit Isolt of Brittany; either way, however, the transgression is identical. Again, Tennyson has artistic justification for his arrangement. Throughout the Idylls, Mark's court at Tintagil represents the antithesis of those virtues which Arthur seeks to instill in his knights; from the time of his entrance into the poem ("Gareth and Lynette," ll. 376 ff.) by attempting to bribe his way into

the Round Table until his final act of slaying Tristram, Mark constantly undermines the ideals of Camelot. This very situation at "romantic" Tintagil furnishes ammunition for the savage parody of Arthur-Guinevere-Lancelot, and Tennyson simply explodes the romantic myth in "The Last Tournament." It is fitting, too, and perhaps ironic that Arthur's mysterious birth and death occur in Lyonesse, the realm of Mark's power. Mark is thoroughly representative of that "ever-climbing wave" of heathen (l. 92) who will apparently rule after the "last, dim, weird battle of the west," a battle fought in Lyonesse ("Passing of Arthur," l. 94).

But Tennyson's omission of Isolt of Brittany from the triangle and from an active part in "The Last Tournament" does not mean that he feels no sympathy for her. Indeed, the corruption of Tristram and the depravity of Mark (who in the original legends, but not in Malory, is a rather sympathetic character) have the added effect of enlisting sympathy for her. We are told little about her, only that she healed Tristram's "hurt and heart with unguent and caress" (l. 590) and that she is "patient, and prayerful, meek, / Pale-blooded" and "will yield herself to God" (ll. 602-03). Spoken by Tristram, himself a rationalizer little given to praise, these last lines do not necessarily praise but certainly do not damage his wife, for he speaks them without bitterness or sarcasm. Through his dream of the two Isolts, Tristram provides the reader further access to Isolt of Brittany. There, it will be recalled, Queen Isolt snatches the carcanet so sharply that she cuts her hand; and Tristram, in his dream at

least, recognizes the difference between the red, passionate hand of Queen Isolt and the white, innocent hand of his wife. However one regards her, Isolt of Brittany has to be reckoned with insofar as she has been wronged, particularly since the agent of her wrong is the major character of the idyll. Despite the scarcity of information regarding her, it is not too much, given his theme of adultery, to suggest that Tennyson's sympathy in the Tristram story lay with the Breton wife. One thing is sure: he sympathized with none of the low, base characters composing the triangle from which he excluded her.

The most significant omission in "The Last Tournament," however, is the love potion, an omission which provides the key to Tennyson's meaning. First, the potion ordinarily lends the story an air of magic and fated romance; its exclusion automatically alters the tone of the tale, making it more realistic. In their language, attitudes, and actions, Tristram, Mark and Isolt are more earthy than Arnold's characters, a quality Tennyson renders largely through bestial imagery. The lovers experience none of the transcendent passion of Wagner's opera: indeed, as far as love is concerned, they operate primarily on the level of animal instinct, seeking to satisfy their bodily desires and rejecting any commitment beyond the moment. Second, and most important, the potion provides a raison d'etre--or excuse--for the passion of Tristram and Isolt; its omission forces the characters back upon themselves and asserts that man must choose, that he is responsible for his choice and his actions.⁶⁴ Moral choice therefore becomes a major idea in "The Last Tournament"

as Tristram and Isolt freely choose to love each other and to violate their vows to their partners in marriage.

Tennyson introduces this idea of moral choice by relating it to the vows each knight swore upon becoming members of the Round Table, vows which included the charge "To love one maiden only, cleave to her" ("Guinevere," l. 472). Dagonet, refusing to dance to Tristram's music, charges him with violating that vow:

For when thou playest that air with Queen Isolt,
Thou makest broken music with thy bride,
Her daintier namesake down in Brittany--
And so thou breakest Arthur's music too. (ll. 263-66)

Dagonet clearly perceives that when one part of the vow is broken the whole contract is shattered. In his defense, Tristram proves the Fool right, rationalizing that when he came to the Round Table "the heathen wars were o'er, / The life had flown, we sware but by the shell" (ll. 269-70). Only adventure and activity, not the vows, are important to him--and the freedom to love whom he pleases. His song keynotes his character:

'Free love--free field--we love but while we may.
The woods are hush'd, their music is no more;
The leaf is dead, the yearning past away.
New leaf, new life--the days of frost are o'er;
New life, new love, to suit the newer day;
New loves are sweet as those that went before.
Free love--free field--we love but while we may.'
(ll. 275-81)

Taking his cue from the impermanence and change exhibited in the phenomena of nature,⁶⁵ he becomes the chief spokesman in the Idylls for a carpe diem philosophy.

But love of this type poses a real danger to both society

and individual. Admitting no social obligation, it seeks only to satisfy itself and threatens to destroy those who make it their measure of freedom. Much earlier in "Lancelot and Elaine," Arthur had articulated this paradox to Lancelot, who in his pity and rejection of Elaine felt that "free love will not be bound"; the King responds, "Free love, so bound, were freest" (ll. 1368-69). Tristram, seeing the vows as restraints to his love, retorts angrily to Isolt when she chides him about his faithlessness to the vows:

Vows! did you keep the vow you made to Mark
 More than I mine? Lied, say ye? Nay, but learnt,
 The vow that binds too strictly snaps itself--
 My knighthood taught me this--ay, being snapt--
 We run more counter to the soul thereof
 Than had we never sworn. I swear no more! (ll. 649-55)

His belief having failed, he rationalizes that the belief was wrong in the first place, that he swore only because he was "amazed" (l. 669). He now sees the vows as "the wholesome madness of an hour" (l. 670) and attempts to justify his conduct by appealing to Lancelot's "sullyng of our Queen" (l. 677). Besides, Arthur, being of doubtful origin, cannot make a man pure or bind him to one maiden; the world laughs at such a notion (ll. 682-90). And Tristram thereupon launches into his declaration of freedom:

And worldling of the world am I, and know
 The ptarmigan that whitens ere his hour
 Woos his own end; we are not angels here
 Nor shall be. Vows--I am woodman of the woods,
 And hear the garnet-headed yaffingale
 Mock them--my soul, we love but while we may;
 And therefore is my love so large for thee,
 Seeing it is not bounded save by love. (ll. 691-98)

The words recall Lancelot's "free love will not be bound," but

this very boundlessness of love proves to be its "fatal limitation."⁶⁶ Tristram does not, in the first place, grant such freedom to others; when Isolt questions his reaction were she to love Lancelot, he grows angry and finally gives her the lie she has craved: "I will love thee to the death, / And out beyond into the dream to come" (ll. 714-15). Second, what he really advocates is not freedom but license to do as one pleases, "Mark's way." Rules which govern society as well as tournaments cease to be important. Accordingly, Mark, who embodies the uncontrolled, undisciplined life, strikes Tristram dead at the very moment the knight hands the carcanet, symbol of dead innocence, to Isolt. John R. Reed comments on Tristram's attitude: "Much as he rails against the vows, he does not truly see all the world consigned to the license he allows himself. He has contempt for Mark, and yet he advocates Mark's way. And in the end, he has it. Furthermore, the liberty Tristram seeks in freeing himself from the supposed bondage of the vows is only license, which entraps him more surely than hopeful visions would have."⁶⁷ In his quest for freedom, he has discovered the surest bondage of all, the bondage of flesh.

Finally, Tennyson's use of the sea in the Idylls may be related to this idea of "boundlessness" of passion. Because Tristram chooses to place himself outside the realm of social necessity, he, like Mark, becomes a representative of all those naturalistic, chaotic forces which ever threaten the kingdom. For years the external foes have lain dormant, having been subdued

by Arthur's knights; but now, under the aegis of the Red Knight, they challenge Arthur again. The king speaks of them in sea imagery as that "ever-climbing wave, / Hurl'd back again so often in empty foam" (ll. 92-93), and again his younger knights put down the revolt in a brutal, senseless slaughter of women and men. Like Tristram, the young knights cannot control their passions, and the threat to the kingdom now becomes internal, for no one wants to be bound by the vows. Tristram, referring to the impotence of the vows to control his lust, implies a connection between the carnal and the sea; he tells Isolt to "feel this arm of mine-- the tide within / Red with free chase and heather-scented air, / Pulsing full man" (ll. 685-87). And Isolt, unable to satisfy her craving for Tristram while he is away, looks upon the sea as a desirable annihilation: "O, sweeter than all memories of thee, / Deeper than any yearnings after thee / Seem'd those far-rolling, westward-smiling seas, / Watch'd from this tower (ll. 581-84). Passion, which can never really be satisfied, thus becomes the love of death, a devolution, according to de Rougemont, inherent in the love of Eros.⁶⁸ In a broader sense, the passion, lust, and carnage of "The Last Tournament" suggest a slow erosion of the social fabric, and chiefly through internal means; Arthur can save the kingdom from its external foes but cannot save it from itself. This idyll is merely a prelude to the last great battle in "The Passing of Arthur" where the sea "washes over the dead, eating away at the narrow strand on which only Arthur and Bedivere remain alive."⁶⁹ The passions, uncontrollable when unbounded by social restraints, find symbolic expression in the sea, which

erodes the last vestiges of civilization.

To be sure, Tennyson does not sing the sea as Wagner and Swinburne do; to him the unbounded freedom which Swinburne especially glories in poses a threat inasmuch as it tends toward license. Rather his interest lies in landed values, in a stable society which can function only through order and social responsibility and loyalty to the vows of marriage. In fact, marriage is the controlling metaphor of the Idylls--the marriage of soul and sense, of knights and vows, Arthur and Guinevere, Tristram and Isolt of Brittany, Isolt of Britain and Mark. When the vows are broken, when man sees himself as a free agent to follow whatever course he desires, social disintegration rapidly follows. Lancelot and Guinevere first violate those vows but never with the defiant attitude of Tristram and Isolt, who desire each other not so much as they desire to escape those responsibilities which their vows entail. Valerie Pitt sums up Tennyson's attitude toward domestic love or marriage: ". . . for Tennyson marriage, as in The Princess, is a union of energies which is to revivify the world. The breaking of the marriage-bond undoes and destroys all this."⁷⁰ Two of Tennyson's masterpieces justify this claim: the joyous celebration of marriage in the "Epilogue" of In Memoriam posits a belief in the moral and spiritual evolution of man; the Idylls in general, "The Last Tournament" in particular, illustrates vividly the effects of breaking the marriage vows--social chaos and disintegration.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

¹The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough, ed. Howard Foster Lowry (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 140. Hereafter cited in text as LC.

²The Poems of Matthew Arnold, ed. Kenneth Allott (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963), p. 195. All references to Arnold's poetry are from this volume.

³C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry, The Poetry of Matthew Arnold: A Commentary (1940; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1970), p. 110.

⁴R. E. C. Houghton, "Letter of Matthew Arnold," TLS, May 19, 1932, p. 368.

⁵See, for instance, Commentary, pp. 153-59; A. Dwight Culler, Imaginative Reason: The Poetry of Matthew Arnold (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 118-22.

⁶Allott, p. 116.

⁷Imaginative Reason, pp. 118-22; quotation from p. 122.

⁸Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold (New York: Norton, 1939), p. 122.

⁹The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry (1952; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1963), p. 163.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 165.

¹¹M. G. Sundell, "The Intellectual Background and Structure of Arnold's Tristram and Iseult," Victorian Poetry, 1 (1963), 276.

¹²"Preface to First Edition of Poems (1853)," On the Classical Tradition, The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, ed. R. H. Super, I (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 4, 12.

¹³Allott, p. 194.

¹⁴Culler, p. 145.

¹⁵Culler, p. 6 et passim.

¹⁶G. Robert Stange, Matthew Arnold: The Poet as Humanist (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 263.

¹⁷Allott, p. 212.

¹⁸Exceptions are Alan Roper, Arnold's Poetic Landscapes (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), pp. 170-73, who sees passionate love as simply a variation on a theme with no moral judgment implied; and M. G. Sundell, cited above, n. 11, who sees Tristram's love, though inconsistent with life, as capable of perceiving and organizing experience and thereby fostering art. Roper, in an earlier article, "The Moral Landscape of Arnold's Poetry," PMLA, 77 (1962), 295, supported the moral view, seeing the whole poem as a "rejection of passion."

¹⁹Arnold's note is reprinted by Allott, p. 220. See Mark Siegchrist, "The Role of Vivian in Arnold's 'Tristram and Iseult,'" Criticism, 16 (1974), 151.

²⁰Roper, Poetic Landscapes, p. 172; Allott, p. 220.

²¹First suggested by Paull F. Baum, Ten Studies in the Poetry of Matthew Arnold (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1958), pp. 40-41.

²²Houghton, "Arnold Letter," p. 368.

²³Alien Vision, p. 189.

²⁴Fraser Nieman, Matthew Arnold (New York: Twayne, 1968), p. 71; quotation from Stange, Poet as Humanist, p. 267.

²⁵"Review of Some Poems by Alexander Smith and Matthew Arnold," in The Poems and Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough, ed. Mrs. A. H. Clough (London: Macmillan, 1869), p. 372; "Poems by Matthew Arnold," Fraser's Magazine, 49 (1854), 147.

²⁶Commentary, p. 124.

²⁷Louis Bonnerot, Matthew Arnold, Poète (Paris: Didier, 1947), p. 92; Allott, p. 216.

²⁸"Role of Vivian," pp. 151-52.

²⁹"The Unity of Arnold's Tristram and Iseult," Victorian Poetry, 1 (1963), 144-45.

³⁰"Matthew Arnold's Refuge of Art: 'Tristram and Iseult,'" Victorian Newsletter, No. 25 (Spring 1964), p. 3.

³¹"Background and Structure of Tristram," pp. 279, 282-83.

³²Letters from the Darkling Plain: Language and the Grounds of Knowledge in the Poetry of Arnold and Hopkins (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1972), pp. 77-79.

³³"Matthew Arnold," The Disappearance of God (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 244.

³⁴Poet as Humanist, p. 262.

³⁵Culler, Imaginative Reason, pp. 143, 145.

³⁶Miller, Disappearance of God, p. 257.

³⁷Alien Vision, p. 188.

³⁸Culler, Imaginative Reason, pp. 4, 6, 12.

³⁹Roper, "Moral Landscapes," p. 292.

⁴⁰Imaginative Reason, p. 143.

⁴¹Matthew Arnold, Poète, p. 93.

⁴²"To R. H. Horne" (Feb. 13, 1886), The Swinburne Letters, ed. Cecil Y. Lang, 4 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 260.

⁴³"'Gareth and Lynette' and 'The Last Tournament,'" London Quarterly Review, 39 (1873), 402-03.

⁴⁴"Tennyson's Serial Poem," in Mid-Victorian Studies, ed. Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1965), p. 105.

⁴⁵"Tennyson and the 'Quarterly Review,'" The Gentleman's Magazine, N. S. 8 (1872), 424.

⁴⁶"The Meaning of Mr. Tennyson's 'King Arthur,'" Contemporary Review, 21 (1873), 941, 945.

⁴⁷"Under the Microscope," The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, Bonchurch Edition, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise, XVI (London: Wm. Heinemann, 1926), 403.

⁴⁸"In Memoriam," Essays Ancient and Modern (London: Faber and Faber, 1936); rpt. in Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson, ed. John Killham (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 215.

⁴⁹Alien Vision, p. 42.

⁵⁰Victorian Revolutionaries: Speculations on Some Heroes of a Culture Crisis (New York: George Braziller, 1970), p. 41.

⁵¹Pitt, Tennyson Laureate (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1962), p. 208; Ricks, Tennyson (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 264-76; Rosenberg, The Fall of Camelot: A Study of Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King' (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Belknap Press, 1973), p. 1.

⁵²"To the Queen," Idylls of the King, The Poetical Works of Tennyson, Cambridge Edition, ed. G. Robert Stange (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 450 (ll. 36-38). This edition is hereafter cited by poem and line in the text.

⁵³Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir (1897, 2 vols.; rpt. 1 vol. London: Macmillan, 1905), p. 524.

⁵⁴Alfred Tennyson (1949; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1968), p. 491.

⁵⁵See Jerome Hamilton Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet (1960; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 177; Clyde de L. Ryals, From the Great Deep: Essays on 'Idylls of the King' (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1967), pp. 192-93; Peckham, Victorian Revolutionaries, pp. 41-42; J. Philip Eggers, King Arthur's Laureate: A Study of Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King' (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 11; Rosenberg, Fall of Camelot, p. 132.

⁵⁶Gerhard Joseph, Tennysonian Love: The Strange Diagonal (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), pp. 164-65.

⁵⁷Buckley, Tennyson, p. 181; Rosenberg, p. 109.

⁵⁸Joseph, pp. 163 ff.; Ryals, pp. 113-45.

⁵⁹Tillotson, p. 106.

⁶⁰Rosenberg, pp. 117-18.

⁶¹Ward Hellstrom, On the Poems of Tennyson (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972), p. 133.

⁶²James R. Kincaid, Tennyson's Major Poems: The Comic and Ironic Patterns (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 203.

⁶³"The Structure of Tennyson's 'The Last Tournament,'" Victorian Poetry, 1 (1963), 56.

⁶⁴Joseph, p. 181.

⁶⁵Ryals, p. 126.

⁶⁶Rosenberg, p. 118.

⁶⁷Perception and Design in Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King'
(Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1969), pp. 120-21.

⁶⁸Love in the Western World, pp. 42-46.

⁶⁹Rosenberg, p. 89.

⁷⁰Tennyson Laureate, p. 184.

CHAPTER III

THE AESTHETIC RESPONSE:

SWINBURNE AND SYMONS VIA WAGNER

Even before Tennyson had written "The Last Tournament," Swinburne had determined to compose his own version of Tristan. Spurred on by Tennyson's treatment of the Arthurian materials, he wrote to Edward Burne-Jones in a letter which Lang dates November 1869:

I want my version to be based on notorious facts, and to be acceptable for its orthodoxy and fidelity to the dear old story: so that Tristram may not be mistaken for his late Royal Highness the Duke of Kent, or Iseult for Queen Charlotte, or Palomydes for Mr. Gladstone. I shan't of course include--much less tell at length, saga-fashion--a tithe of the various incidents given in the different old versions: but I want to have in everything pretty that is of any importance, and in keeping with the tone and spirit of the story--not burlesque or dissonant or inconsistent. The thought of your painting and Wagner's music ought to abash but does stimulate me.¹

Besides revealing Swinburne's usual bias against Tennyson's Idylls, the letter indicates two important developments for the history of Tristan: the emerging aesthetic movement in art, particularly through the use of the word "pretty," and the influence of Wagner's Tristan und Isolde on the literary imagination.

As a general movement in nineteenth-century English literature, aestheticism is concerned with the autonomy of art, with a love of beauty and artifice, with form and style

over content, with the internalizing of symbols, and with a calculated perversity in theme and attitude; an inclusive term, it embraces ideas such as impressionism, decadence, and symbolism.²

Early in his career Swinburne aligned himself with this movement, which had its origins in France. His defense of Baudelaire in 1862 at age twenty-five indicated clearly his attitude toward art: ". . . a poet's business is presumably to write good verses, and by no means to redeem the age and remould society."³ And on Gautier's death in 1873, he composed an elegy honoring the artist and a sonnet praising Mademoiselle de Maupin (III, 52-60), the "Preface" of which had become a kind of manifesto for the aesthetic movement at large. Meanwhile, his Poems and Ballads (1866) and "William Blake" (1868) had further declared his independence from the high Victorians. Poems and Ballads, especially such poems as "Dolores," "Anactoria," and "Faustine," illustrated what the Blake essay later made unmistakably clear--that the artist should avoid public concern with morality. In the essay he states:

Art is not like fire or water, a good servant and bad master; rather the reverse . . . Handmaid of religion, exponent of duty, servant of fact, pioneer of morality, she cannot in any way become . . . Her business is not to do good on other grounds, but to be good on her own . . . To ask help or furtherance from her in any extraneous good work is exactly as rational as to expect lyrical beauty of form and flow in a logical treatise . . . Art for art's sake first of all, and afterwards we may suppose all the rest shall be added to her . . . let us hear no more of the moral mission of earnest art . . . Philistia had far better (always providing it be possible) crush art at once, hang or burn it out of the way, than think of plucking out its eyes and setting it to

grind moral corn in the Philistine mills; which it is certain not to do at all well. (XIV, 137-40)

Devotion to art for the sake of art did not, however, preclude social, religious, and political themes in poetry ("Victor Hugo," XIII, 244), a claim which his own Songs Before Sunrise (1871) supports.

Much later, in fact during the early years of the twentieth century,⁴ Arthur Symons, another writer associated with the aesthetic movement, composed a verse drama, Tristan and Iseult. But before turning to Tristan, he had already formulated his most important statement on art. In the "Introduction" to The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899), he declares that symbolism, of which he apparently intended to make his Tristan an example, is "an attempt to spiritualise literature, to evade the old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority. Description is banished that beautiful things may be evoked, magically." Put another way, it is the search for essences, an attempt to achieve in poetry what music does through evocation and suggestion; it eliminates discourse and seeks the autonomous image, whereby "the soul of things can be made visible." Poetry which achieves this "becomes itself a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual."⁵ Art, in short, becomes solely an expression of the private vision of the artist. And it may even become so obscure, as Symons realized in discussing Mallarmé, that it ends in confusion and precludes an audience altogether. It could hardly be farther removed from the

didacticism of Tennyson and Arnold.

It is only natural, then, that when Swinburne and Symonds turned to the Tristan legend, they would treat it differently from their Victorian predecessors, for art itself meant something different to them. What mattered most to them was that the subject afforded the artist a vision of beauty which could be communicated in an equally beautiful style; what mattered least was that it could be approached morally. Before they could transcribe those visions, however, they had to reckon with another vision of the same subject, Wagner's Tristan und Isolde (1859).

Act I of the opera occurs on shipboard during the last hours of the voyage from Ireland to Cornwall and centers on the drinking of the love potion, which Tristan and Isolde believe to be a death potion. Already in love before this fatal moment, the lovers drink at Iseult's request but really from a sense of honor--Tristan because his loyalty to Mark demanded that he take Isolde to the King without her consent and without acknowledging his (Tristan's) love for her; Isolde because it would be dishonorable to marry the man whose nephew she loved. Act II, the Liebesnacht, occurs perhaps a month later in a nocturnal garden where the lovers meet clandestinely and rhapsodize on the ecstasies of love; reality intrudes as Melot, Mark, and the hunters rush in and Melot fatally wounds Tristan, who refuses to fight. Act III takes place in Brittany, where Tristan lies dying, waiting for the arrival of Isolde. Just before she enters, he rips the bandages off his wound and then

dies in her arms. After the arrival of Mark's party and a brief scuffle between Kurwenal and Melot, who kill each other, Isolde perishes on the body of Tristan as she sings the Liebestod.

What the libretto most strikingly reveals, as this summary indicates, is Wagner's genius for simplification. What little background action is required for entry into the opera he supplies in retrospect, through the words of Tristan and Isolde in Act I. In Act II he condenses all the secret stratagems and rendezvous of the lovers into one archetypal meeting. But most notably he dispenses with Isolde of the White Hands and all the tanglements, such as the black and white sails, which her presence entails. By stripping away excess material and condensing the exploits in Gottfried, his source, into three pregnant scenes, he compels the audience to examine and respond to the extraordinary love of the two central characters.

But how should the audience respond? It is a commonplace with Wagner scholars that Tristan is the most misunderstood of all his operas and that one reason, ironically, may be the music itself, for the average theater-goer may permit himself to be overwhelmed by the music without listening to the words at all.⁶ That has generally led to the view of Tristan as an apotheosis of erotic love, a view perpetuated by some critics and by any number of record covers and introductions. William Albert Nitze, for example, says: "The Liebestod is not annihilation; it is joy and freedom. It is the paeon of all who have really felt."⁷ And John Culshaw, introducing the libretto for the London

recording, remarks: "The allegory of Tristan and Isolde is not a negation of life . . . The supreme beauty of Tristan is that it is a religious work; an affirmation that love is for eternity; that this is not all."⁸ That it is a religious work de Rougemont agrees, but poisonous for being so, for it sings of Manichaeism dualism. Because Wagner could not expound the malevolence of Manichaeism openly--the "dissolution of forms and beings" and "desire become anathema"--he sublimated it under "the attraction of the sexes, the purely animal law which the body obeys" and thereby "restored the mislaid significance of the legend in all its virulence."⁹

Act II opens up the problem of Manichaeism. There Tristan and Isolde sing of the detested Day--the world of honor, fame, ambition, social responsibilities. Since partaking of the philtre, their one desire has been to escape this world and achieve a perfect, eternal union in love; the world of reality is a barrier to that goal and therefore their enemy. The literal night, in which they hide from the prying eyes of the world and sing of the raptures of love, becomes a symbol of their desire. Only in Night can they achieve perfect union, but Night, as they rhapsodize it, means death. What the long duet really expresses, then, is a death wish. And the one significant action of Act II confirms that wish: Tristan, when challenged by Melot, refuses to fight and willingly sustains a fatal wound. In Manichaeism terms, the ordinary world or Day, which they despise, functions as the realm of the Demiurge, of shadows; the Night which they praise and seek is actually the

realm of spirit or uncreated Light. (It should be added here that Wagner may well have discovered the Day-Night imagery in the romantic poems of Novalis, Hymns to the Night.)

With or without the Manichaeian terminology, one may detect a dangerous quality of Tristan. Declaring the subject of the opera to be "unconsummated passion," Elliott Zuckerman notes that "passion is associated with death" and that Wagner, unlike the medieval poets, purposely keeps Tristan and Isolde chaste. Not only is the lovers' passion unconsummated, but apparently Isolde has never yet shared the bed of Mark. Such an earthly union would violate the ideal of Tristan and Isolde. Zuckerman agrees with de Rougemont that the lovers are really in love with love, not with each other, that they merely seek obstacles to prolong their passion; he concludes that Tristan is indeed an apotheosis of erotic love but "the unhealthiest Eros--the boundless desire for a suicidal union with the Infinite, objectified in a human love impossible of fulfillment."¹⁰ The prolongation of passion, without any attempt at fulfillment, also finds expression in the "postponed cadential, coitus reservatus character of Wagner's harmony."¹¹

Another view of the opera, shared by Peckham and Raphael, holds that though Tristan may appear to be an apotheosis of erotic love it is in fact ironic, for erotic love is an illusion.¹² Of all the nineteenth-century tenets of transcendentalism, the only one to penetrate deeply into the fabric of society was transcendental love. The notion that one could be redeemed through love derived ultimately from the idea of

the transcendental hero who could redeem society, an idea which Wagner espoused in his early operas The Flying Dutchman, Tannhäuser, and Lohengrin, and which he still believed when he began The Ring. But before he completed The Ring, he perceived transcendentalism to be an illusion. With that discovery he turned to Tristan and centered the idea of transcendentalism not in a social redeemer but in the only notion of transcendentalism the public understood--and only to expose it as an illusion.

The difficulty with transcendental love is that the lover becomes dependent on the beloved to confirm his identity so that what he sees in the beloved is an image of himself. The lovers therefore do not see each other but only themselves. Without the image, they sink into nothingness. And though they may say, as Tristan and Isolde do in Act II, that they desire to merge their identities in a perfect union, what they really seek is a loss of identity. The Liebesnacht demonstrates how the "lovers exploit each other's emotions" in an effort to merge their identities. But such a union can only be achieved in death--their ultimate goal--and in death, Peckham wryly comments, one "can scarcely enjoy the loss of identity."¹³ The whole notion is exposed as an insanity. Once--and only once--Tristan recognizes his error; in Act III, he first curses the potion but then perceives that he alone brewed it, that he created his own torment:

That fearful drink
 which acquainted me with torment,
 I myself, myself
 I brewed it.
 Out of my father's distress
 and my mother's pains
 out of love's tears
 past and future,
 out of laughter and weeping,
 ecstasies and wounds,
 for that drink I
 found the poisonous contents.¹⁴

And then he curses himself. Raphael suggests that Wagner apparently intends for us to penetrate and understand and share his and Tristan's "keen insight into the real nature of the illusion by beholding the irony of Isolde's and Tristan's fate: that the only redemption from love is death." If we do, we will not participate in the "consummation of Isolde's great illusion."¹⁵

But if love is merely a model psychosis, if it cannot redeem man or society, where can man find value? Peckham contends that Wagner goes beyond Schopenhauer, from whom he drew much of the "philosophy" of Tristan, in draining the self of value. Schopenhauer had drained nature and society of value and centered it in the self through the denial of will, the utter indifference to gratifications. The self then imagines that it can redeem the world--or individuals--through a social role, a process called transcendentalism. But a dual violation occurs: "The lover violates the beloved by exploiting her as a symbol; and he violates himself by making his identity depend upon a symbol."¹⁶ Transcendental love is shown, then, to be an illusion; it cannot confirm the independent identity of the

self but instead robs the self of value. Wagner's answer to the question of value occurs not in Tristan but in his next opera, The Meistersinger, in the character of Walther, another young lover who writes poetry and sets it to music. Neither Walther nor any man is free of illusions, for illusions sustain man, but art is free "because it does not pretend to anything else." Art "introduces value into the world by creating in the hearts of men the experience of order and meaning"; rather than asserting that there is order, meaning, and value in the world, it simply gives "the man who looks at the world the experience of value." And Peckham supports this idea in Wagner by alluding to The Ring and the Book, where Browning was saying the same thing, that art "is 'true' because it is a lie and doesn't pretend to be anything else."¹⁷ Art as the source of value--the idea has tremendous implications for the aesthetic movement, for there art becomes a virtual religion, supplanting the old notions of art as morality and love as a redemptive force with art as vision and beauty as its motivating force. Art, however, does not redeem mankind; it merely gives man the experience of value, momentary at best, by enabling him to break through illusions, not by proclaiming ultimate truths.

One further observation deserves comment as possibly illuminating the meaning of Wagner's Tristan. In Nil: Episodes in the Literary Conquest of Void During the Nineteenth Century, Robert Martin Adams identifies the salient features of the opera as the total lack of dramatic conflict and the "positive unconsciousness" which the lovers seek and into which they sink.¹⁸

Love in this sense is neither an illusion nor an apotheosis. The lovers are not escaping the world but "transcending and transfiguring and interiorizing it," achieving "self-fulfillment through self-annihilation" and eternal life through "deliberate death"--an achievement made possible by music and the language of paradox, which suggest "a world outside thought, a world of exploding, potent consciousness which mere language is unable to contain." Further, Wagner deliberately avoids the imagery of apotheosis, for he wishes to shun any suggestion of established systems and institutions and their values, including Christianity. Instead, his lovers create the mystery into which they are initiated, and it is positive and desirable: ". . . those who disdain the world and all that is in it must have seen something beyond it which is precious indeed."¹⁹

However the artists of the aesthetic movement reacted to Wagner's Tristan--whether they perceived it as a glorification of erotic love, penetrated its ironic mask to discover erotic love as an illusion, or found in the longing for death suggestions of a more positive existence in a self-created cosmos, or none of these--theirs was an immense burden: they had to create under the shadow of the master. They could in no way escape his influence. Obviously Swinburne and Symons did not perceive Wagner's Tristan in quite the same way as cultural critics and historians such as de Rougemont and Peckham. The poets responded to the opera imaginatively, not intellectually; they caught fire perhaps from Wagner but burned in their own artistic manner.

On a more elemental level, Wagner provided the aesthetes an alternative to the moral views of Tristan in Arnold and Tennyson. By omitting Isolde of the White Hands and focusing on the lovers, Wagner stripped the story of much of its didactic potential; conversely, by seizing upon and accentuating the music of the sea, he breathed new life and passion into the legend. The major point of both Arnold and Tennyson, the salutary and redemptive power of married love, he exorcised from his rendition. And if one accepts Peckham's thesis that transcendental love is an illusion, that it can redeem neither the individual nor society, then Tristan und Isolde also points up the weakness of the Idylls as a whole: Arthur's dream of redeeming the world, of creating a perfect society, is doomed to failure because it is based on man's most cherished illusion, love.

Any commentary on Tristan must finally acknowledge that the opera achieves its power through music, not words or action. Indeed, the poetry is so paradoxical and elliptical in places (such as Act II) as almost to defy analysis; and action is so limited that even the slightest act, such as Isolde's quenching of the torch (Act II), assumes extraordinary significance. Of the action, Ernest Newman comments: ". . . it is virtually unnecessary, for the veritable drama is not in what 'happens' to Tristan and Isolde in the world of reality but in what evolves within themselves, and this is revealed to us principally by the music."²⁰ Throughout his analysis of Tristan, Newman returns again and again to the problem of the poetry, noting that Wagner's

reduction of words to a minimum often veils rather than discloses his meaning, that the music in its superior capacity to express feeling may in fact "give the lie" to the accompanying words. Paraphrasing Wagner's remarks to baffled readers of the libretto, he writes: "'Wait until you hear the work with the music; that will make everything plain to you, in terms, however, not of words, which are a clumsy tool created by human reflection, but of feeling; for music, which comes from the foundations, not the surface, of man and things, is capable of a thousand shades of suggestion that are beyond the capacity of words.'"21

One reason for the overwhelming quality of the music was Wagner's discovery in 1854 of Schopenhauer, who insisted that music was superior to the other arts. Until that time, Wagner had endeavored to synthesize poetry, music, drama, and spectacle; afterward, and especially in Tristan, he subordinated everything to music, so that "much of the compelling action of Tristan occurs exclusively in the orchestra."²² One primary effect of the music was to restore the sea to its proper place in the legend. Nietzsche, according to Zuckerman, associated the music with "diving, swimming, and drowning," while writers under the influence of Wagner (such as Swinburne, D'Annunzio, and Mann) invariably found in Wagner's chromaticism connotations of the ocean.²³ Wherever the note of longing is sounded, from the Prelude to the Liebestod, the music generally suggests the sea, the moving of waters, the desire of Tristan and Isolde to submerge themselves in the unconscious, in death. In this

regard, Robert Raphael observes that the imagery often supports the music.²⁴ At the end of Act I, for example, the lovers express their new-found joy and isolation: "How our hearts / surge like waves, / how all our senses / spring up miraculously" (p. 59). Again, in Act II, Isolde describes the nocturnal fountains that call to her (p. 63); finally, in the Liebestod, she sings of "waves of gentle air," asks if she should "sip them" or "dive below them" as "they surge, flood around" her, and then submits to their overwhelming power:

In the heaving tide,
in the ringing sound,
in the cosmic breath's
gusty totality,
drown,
sink,
unconscious,
highest bliss! (p. 137)

Even where music and imagery are not so happily and clearly joined, the music often suggests the sea of love and the lovers' desire to sink into it. The ultimate power of Wagner's music is perhaps best suggested by de Rougemont: "Music alone could utter the unutterable, and music forced the final secret of Tristan."²⁵

After Wagner, and because of him, interest in the legend intensified. For the many poets who felt his power and influence, few dared to re-create Tristan; to do so was to risk adverse comparison. Two who accepted that challenge were Swinburne and Symons.

Swinburne's "Queen Yseult" and Tristram of Lyonesse

The initial spark for Swinburne, however, did not come from Wagner. In a letter to Paul Hamilton Hayne (May 2, 1877), he wrote of the Tristram legend: "The story was my delight (as far as a child could understand it) before I was ten years old."²⁶ And his earliest attempt to render the story in verse, "Queen Yseult" (1857-58), preceded Wagner's opera (1859). In this fragment, Swinburne treated the parentage of Tristram and his rise to knighthood; the voyage to Cornwall and the drinking of the love potion; the love of Tristram and Queen Yseult for three years at Tintagel; Tristram's voyage to Brittany; the wedding night of Tristram and Yseult of the White Hands; and Queen Yseult's longing for Tristram at Tintagel. Inspired by Morris's paintings of Sir Tristram in the Oxford Union debating hall and imitative of Morris's poems,²⁷ "Queen Yseult" interests one today only insofar as it reveals the influences operating upon the young poet as well as his own originality.

Those influences, as might be expected, are largely Pre-Raphaelite. In metrical form--trochaic tercets--the poem imitates Morris's "The Willow and the Red Cliff," which Swinburne had recently heard him read.²⁸ The monotonous effect created by this form helps to lend the poem a static quality quite unlike the vigorous middle-English Sir Tristrem (his main source) but typical of Pre-Raphaelite poetry. Further, the color and decoration, particularly the "golden corn-ripe hair"

of Queen Yseult, suggest Rossetti's sensual images of long, flowing hair. The image of "golden hair," in fact, dominates the poem, from the moment when Tristram considers it knightly to die for her hair (I, 24), through their first night together aboard ship as her hair flows over their faces (I, 31), until the last scene when Yseult, wishing for Tristram, acknowledges that he might find her older but still golden-haired (I, 62). That Swinburne was captivated by the image of loose, flowing hair is further seen in his treatment of Yseult of the White Hands: though it is not golden, her hair sweeps "round her knees" (I, 49) as she stands and oversweeps her body as she lies in bed (I, 53). In addition to hair, the golden ring (symbol of love and loyalty) which Blancheflour left to Tristram weaves in and out of the poem. But the most decorative scene is the wedding night, when her maidens prepare the second Yseult's bed, strewing red, blue, and purple flowers around it and white flowers on it; against this background, the bride, dressed in blue, disrobes and observes herself and the entire scene in a mirror, her tresses all the while covering her naked body (I, 49).

Other elements of "Queen Yseult" bear Swinburne's special imprint, the most striking of which is the inversion of sexual roles in *Tristram and the Queen*.²⁹ From the outset Yseult is the dominant party. On the voyage to Cornwall it is she--unlike the sailors in Wagner and Tristram in Swinburne's later work--who sings for the rowers (I, 27-28); as a result, she grows thirsty and requires drink (the love potion). At Tintagel, when

Tristram fears detection of his footprints in the snow, she assumes the aggressive role and carries him on her back to her chamber (I, 35-37), an extraordinary physical feat which suggests Tristram to be, like the poet, small in stature. But this episode is hardly more daring than the following one, in which she easily faces down her accuser (the charge, adultery) and makes a laughingstock of Mark (I, 38-39). Afterward she, not Mark or his barons, bids Tristram to leave (I, 39). Whenever she enters the poem she completely dominates the action, a meaning Swinburne apparently intended if we may take the title, "Queen Yseult," to be representative of his intentions. Indeed, the discrepancy between her dominance and her appearance in the poem may partially explain why Swinburne finally gave up on this early version, for of the six completed cantos she appears in only three.

Only once, when he kills Moronde in the first canto, does Tristram emerge as the fabled hero noted for his prowess (I, 17); afterward, he submits passively to Yseult's wishes. Even with Yseult of the White Hands he seems passive; when, for example, she draws near to him in their bridal bed, he trembles, partly out of fear that he will violate his love for Queen Yseult but also, the scene suggests, out of a basic timidity (I, 51). Added to his passivity is at least one touch of masochism. When he first sees Queen Yseult,

. . . he thought it well and meet,
Lain before that lady sweet,
To be trodden by her feet. (I, 25)

Taken together, the inversion of sexual roles and hint of

masochism point directly toward Poems and Ballads (1866), in which the femme fatale (Dolores and Faustine, for instance) dominates and often brutalizes and destroys her lovers.

One other character, Mark, deserves comment. Basically, he is low, base, weak, cold. Always described as "lean and cold" (I, 20, 21, 32, 38), he is easily made a fool of by Yseult (I, 38-39). After Tristram leaves, he lives uneasily with the Queen, envious of Tristram's place in her heart and wishing she were dead. His jealousy even affects him physically, causing his face to grow more "long and lean" and his lips "more pale" (I, 54). Reduced to drunkenness, he continues to sleep beside her but communicates only out of hatred and fear (I, 61). As the poem breaks off, he appears utterly ravaged by hatred. He emerges, in short, as a caricature, not as destructive perhaps as Malory's Mark, but just as mean-spirited.

Except for one brief fragment, "Joyeuse Garde," written shortly after "Queen Yseult," Swinburne laid aside the story of Tristram for about ten years. In the meantime, he had gained fame with Atalanta in Calydon and suffered excoriation with Poems and Ballads, two volumes which exposed, among other things, the inadequacy of and the violations involved in erotic love.³⁰ When next he mentioned Tristram (November, 1869), he declared, in the letter cited above, that he wished to include in his version "everything pretty that is of any importance." A month later he wrote to Dante Gabriel Rossetti that, having read a few lines of Tennyson's "Holy Grail," "I fell at once tooth and

nail upon Tristram and Iseult and wrote at an overture of the poem projected, all yesterday."³¹ So, despite his later outrage at Tennyson's "The Last Tournament," it was not that idyll but "The Holy Grail" which prompted him to return to Tristram. And possibly because he heard of the approaching publication of "The Last Tournament" (December, 1871), he published "The Prelude" to Tristram of Lyonesse in late 1871.³² Still he procrastinated. During the 1870's he worked intermittently on the narrative but did not settle down to it seriously until October, 1881; from that moment on, he worked tirelessly until he completed it in April, 1882.³³ The complete poem was published in July, 1882, in the volume Tristram of Lyonesse and Other Poems.

According to Edmund Gosse, Watts-Dunton persuaded Swinburne to publish Tristram in a volume containing much miscellaneous, innocuous verse, mostly in praise of children, in an attempt to ward off hostile criticism of the erotic passages.³⁴ Swinburne expressed this sentiment in a letter to William Bell Scott of April 17, 1882: "I expect 'the Mothers of England' to rally round me on the publication of a volume in which, out of a total of one hundred poems, between forty and fifty are devoted to the praise of little children: though I cannot expect the approbation of the British Matron for certain passages--or indeed for one entire canto--of the leading poem, 'Tristram of Lyonesse.'"³⁵ The ploy, however, did not entirely succeed. In a survey of contemporary reviews of Tristram, Clyde Kenneth Hyder demonstrates that though some periodicals, such as The British Quarterly Review and

The Academy, muffled their criticism of Tristram in favor of extolling the poems about children, others were not deflected; both The Saturday Review and The Spectator, for example, denounced Tristram for its eroticism, "low intrigue," and blasphemy.³⁶

Another criticism, one which has continued to the present day, and perhaps with some justification, concerned Swinburne's rhetorical excess and its corollary, a bewildering narrative line. The Critic complained: "We do not understand, one half the time, what he is driving at. The words are fine, and their music is spirited; but we fail to perceive their bearing upon what he has in hand . . . He is always thinking of the verbal splendors that he has launched upon, the pyrotechnics that he is throwing up, to consider the demands of the story . . ."; further, because such a "mist of imagery" violates the "impression which a narrative poem should have upon the mind" by making it impossible to retain "one word" or "one line," Tristram "might as well have been left unwritten."³⁷ The Literary World, though praising the poem in some respects as "the finest sustained effort of its author so far as genuine poetry is concerned," nonetheless found it hopelessly confusing; it overwhelms "the reader with imaginative wealth and verbal and rhythmic splendor, until all knowledge of the author's meaning is obscured, involved, transfused with the glory of mere word-rhapsodies that flash color in the mental retina and fill the ear with sensuous but alas! unmeaning music."³⁸ More recent critics have echoed this opinion. T. Sturge Moore uses an image

of flying to explain Swinburne's verse: ". . . we have winged words in the open . . . We are delighted, buoyancy and zest invigorate us, but the wind blows for ever . . . and it constantly drives the tale out of the mind instead of home to it"; he regrets, moreover, that the poet "pretended that this private rhapsody was a story."³⁹ Others who detect the same weaknesses are Gosse, Chew, and Welby;⁴⁰ in a very sympathetic account, Welby admits that "the final effect, I say it with great reluctance, is one of fatigue. One puts down the poem with dazzled, aching eyes." Most recently, Philip Henderson laments: "One sighs for what Swinburne dismissed as 'the short-winded and artificial concision of Tennyson.'"⁴¹ Swinburne never deigned to defend the poetics of Tristram, but he did, in the Dedicatory Epistle, explain what his intentions were concerning the narrative:

My aim was simply to present that story, not diluted and debased as it had been in our own time by other hands . . . and not in the epic or romantic form of sustained or continuous narrative, but mainly through a succession of dramatic scenes or pictures with descriptive settings or backgrounds.⁴²

This defense notwithstanding, most readers still struggle through the story of Tristram as through a brilliant maze, not entirely lost but at least dazzled.

Narrative the poem nevertheless contains. And because of its length it merits a brief summary. After the "Prelude," a resplendent paean to love, the action begins with "The Sailing of the Swallow," an account of the voyage of Tristram and Iseult from Ireland to Cornwall; all the needed background is supplied

in a flashback, while all the foreground is occupied first with Tristram's tales to Iseult of King Arthur's court and then with the drinking of the fatal potion. One of Tristram's tales, though not ideally integrated into the poem, bears special significance: It tells of the ultimate doom of Camelot as a result of Arthur's incestuous affair with Queen Morgause and is an obvious jab at Tennyson's concept of the ideal king. Canto II, "The Queen's Pleasance," treats the wedding of Iseult and Mark, the substitution of Brangwain for Iseult in the bridal bed, and the blissful liebesnacht of Tristram and Iseult after he rescues her from Palamede. Much of Canto III, "Tristram in Brittany," is rather static, treating Tristram's meditations on life and fate three years after the previous canto; the action gently modulates into the poignant, blossoming love of Iseult of the White Hands for Tristram. Canto IV, "The Maiden Marriage," first flashes back to Tintagel and the reason for Tristram's journey to Brittany (his capture by Mark's knights and his escape by leaping into the sea) and then concludes with the unconsummated love of Tristram and his Breton wife on their wedding night. Meanwhile, Iseult in the next part, "Iseult at Tintagel," pleads powerfully and selflessly with God that she may see her lover once more or, if not, that they might be united after death. "Joyous Gard," the next canto, relates Tristram's journey back to Cornwall and his flight with Iseult, through the aid of Guenevere, to Joyous Gard, a castle in the North; here in a chill atmosphere of barren land and stormy sea they enjoy their last hours together. Canto VII, "The Wife's

Vigil," describes the distraught Breton Iseult, poisoned by jealousy, as she appeals to God for vengeance. The next canto, "The Last Pilgrimage," switches back to Joyous Gard where Tristram, summoned by Arthur to fight Urgan, bids farewell to Iseult; he kills Urgan, then returns to Brittany where he suffers a fatal wound in defense of a beleaguered knight. "The Sailing of the Swan," the final canto, recounts Tristram's last hours, Iseult of the White Hands' lie concerning the sails of her approaching rival, and the lovers' deaths and eventual burial in the sea.

For the raw material of his poem, Swinburne turned primarily to Sir Tristrem, the middle-English romance he had used earlier for "Queen Yseult"; this version, a translation of Thomas, provided him with most of the action. For one essential thread, however--the connection of Tristram with Arthurian materials--he turned elsewhere, to Bérout, Reid suggests, and perhaps to Malory. Certainly he knew Malory, as his criticism of Tennyson attests; but he rejected the savage treatment of Mark and the brutal conclusion, Mark's slaying of Tristram.⁴³

Besides the actual sources, two other influences helped to shape the poem. First, Swinburne's dogged determination to show Tennyson's "error" in blaming Guenevere for the fall of Camelot accounts for the injection of Arthurian material and consequently for the weakest part of Tristram; these scattered episodes often have little or nothing to do with the poem's main subject, the love which consumes Tristram and Iseult.

Second, Wagner's Tristan not only reinforced some of Swinburne's own thinking about the legend but also supplied him with new material. To what extent he actually knew Wagner's opera is not clear. He had referred to the music as early as November, 1869,⁴⁴ but there is no conclusive evidence that he knew the entire opera. What is certain is that he could not have heard a complete performance until June 20, 1882, two months after the completion of his poem and one month before its publication. Nonetheless, Francis Jacques Sypher, Jr., demonstrates in a carefully detailed study that Swinburne had read Auguste de Gasperini's Richard Wagner (which contained portions of Tristan) in 1869, had heard the "Prelude" as early as July 24, 1872, and had apparently read the full libretto in French from his personal copy of a book called Quatre poèmes d'opéras (published in 1861). Furthermore, his acquaintance with several musicians, such as Edward Danreuther, Frans Hüffer, and George Powell, undoubtedly exposed him to Tristan, for all were ardent Wagnerians.⁴⁵

The important point is not how thoroughly Swinburne knew the opera but how that knowledge, limited or extensive as it might have been, influenced his own version of the legend. That influence takes several forms. For one, the lovers' passionate and prolonged desire for the embrace of death in Wagner strengthened Swinburne's own conception of love as inextricably bound to frustration or death. In addition, the lovers' language provided him with the imagery of night and day.⁴⁶ Swinburne, for instance, echoes Wagner's imagery in

such passages as these, the first from the "Prelude" and the other from "The Sailing of the Swan" as Tristram lies dying:

Love, that is first and last of all things made,
The light that has the living world for shade, . . .
The body spiritual of fire and light
That is to worldly noon as noon to night. (IV, 5)

'Ay, this were
How much more than the sun and sunbright air,
How much more than the springtide, how much more
Than sweet strong sea-wind quickening wave and shore
With one divine pulse of continuous breath,
If she /Iseult/ might kiss me with the kiss of death,
And make the light of life by death's look dim!' (IV, 143)

Further, he may have learned from his observation of Wagner's leitmotifs to repeat certain key words and passages in a conscious, disciplined manner "suggestive of musical composition."⁴⁷ And the static effect of the poem, despite the episodic action, may result partly from the influence of Wagner.⁴⁸

The length and difficulty of Tristram have apparently militated against any extensive study of the poem, even in an age when Swinburne has begun again to receive favorable notice. Biographers, of course, always comment, usually superficially, on the poem, and a few critics in thematic or specialized studies of Swinburne have examined it. But only two scholars, John R. Reed and Kerry McSweeney, have devoted their energies to concentrated studies.⁴⁹ Though almost no one asserts the poem to be a total success, most concur with Chew's judgment that Swinburne's poem "is incomparably the finest rendering of the legend in English literature."⁵⁰ Rosenberg labels it "one of the great erotic poems in English,"⁵¹

and Cassidy, who is less than sympathetic to much of Swinburne, praises it as "a truly fine poem."⁵²

Tristram is principally about love and fate, the themes which open and close the poem. The invocation to Love (the first forty-four lines of the "Prelude") is transmuted into a meditation on fate in the first forty-four lines of "The Sailing of the Swan"; in each case, the rhyming words are identical. McSweeney contends that love and fate are actually the same thing seen from different perspectives: Love is a generative, cosmic force which, seen from a standpoint of the individual, becomes fate, inasmuch as man can see only from the point of view of death and mutability. "Fate is Love seen sub specie mortalitatis." The poem, he further argues, presents a "purely naturalistic vision of life," and the lovers can be judged only in terms of how clearly they apprehend the natural world of death and change, that is, "how fully they give themselves to . . . Love and Fate." Beyond death there is nothing, merely oblivion.⁵³ Reed agrees that fate is another form of love, though he associates love primarily with fire and sun and fate with wind and tide. However, fate is also the source of flame (love) and fate leads past death "to the peace beyond." Because love has enabled Tristram and Iseult to be in complete harmony with nature, with destiny, they "are assured a place of peace after death, embowered eternally beyond trivial change." Love, then, enables man to transcend time and death. And the poem, Reed concludes, presents "Swinburne's belief in an omnific and transcendent force which he calls Love."⁵⁴

It is indeed possible that the tale of immortal lovers

furnished Swinburne with a temporary belief in transcendental love. Insofar as Tristram and Iseult have lived in myth and legend they have surely transcended time, and Swinburne might have sought--indeed did, according to Reed--to further assure their immortality. Such a reading is valid, especially if the poem is considered in isolation from the corpus of Swinburne's love poetry. Most of Swinburne's major poetry, Rosenberg points out, treats the association of love and death, but love is "doomed, bleak, sick, and sterile"; what distinguishes Tristram from those poems is the fulfillment of love, fated though it is.⁵⁵ If, however, Swinburne had explored the dangers and inadequacies of eroticism in Poems and Ballads and had, as Peckham believes, concluded that "true love" is no way out of such madness,⁵⁶ it seems doubtful that he would suddenly develop a belief in transcendental love. Nowhere else in his poetry is there evidence to substantiate such a belief. Again, it is conceivable that, in this one instance, Swinburne's romanticism led him to such a position; however, given his general disposition toward love, it seems more likely to me that the poem is ironic in the same manner as Wagner's Tristan. Whether he intended it to be ironic from the outset is questionable; what seems more certain is that before finishing it his insight into the failure of eroticism checked any inclination to affirm love as a transcendent force. A brief look at Swinburne's attitude toward erotic love and the sea and his special achievement in style will hopefully make this theory tenable.

Atalanta and Poems and Ballads both treat the idea of erotic love. In the former, love is beautiful but destructive and sterile, centered primarily in Meleager and Atalanta. Meleager, out of love for the virgin huntress, slays his uncles and thereby invites his own death at the hands of Althaea, his mother--all because of his love for the strange woman. But Atalanta herself is indirectly responsible for his death; she is a femme fatale, a "frigid Venus," unresponsive to the love of Meleager.⁵⁷ Swinburne catches the contradictions and complications inherent in love in the famous chorus:

We have seen thee, O Love, thou art fair; thou
 art goodly, O Love; . . .
 And twain go forth beside thee, a man with a maid;
 Her eyes are the eyes of a bride whom delight
 makes afraid;
 As the breath in the buds that stir is her
 bridal breath:
 But Fate is the name of her; and his name is
 Death. (VII, 294)

Venus, the chorus continues, is "an evil blossom . . . born of sea-foam and the frothing of blood," whose seed is "laughter and tears" and whose leaves are "madness and scorn" (VII, 294). Love, beautiful and deadly, assures man of two things: an inevitable attraction to her (that is man's Fate) and the equally inevitable pain, mutability, and Death. Poems and Ballads explores a much wider range of eroticism, homo- and hetero-eroticism, both of which include a sense of violation and bondage. "Anactoria," for instance, reveals the sadistic pleasure of inflicting pain in homo-eroticism, while "Laus Veneris" and "Phaedra" present images of a man and woman enslaved by eroticism, Tannhäuser by his perception of

femininity and Phaedra by her perception of masculinity.⁵⁸ "Dolores" and "Faustine" further exhibit sadism and masochism, the tyranny and submission often involved in eroticism. But Swinburne's intention was not to glorify and espouse this distorted eroticism but rather to expose the "failure of eroticism, which from its very nature produces a frustration which can be gratified only with destruction or self-destruction, torture and murder, or self-laceration and suicide. Eroticism is revealed as something inseparable from emotional and physical suffering and torture."⁵⁹ In fact, Poems and Ballads should be read, Peckham says, as one long monologue dealing with the themes of suffering, humiliation, "the madness of Eros, and the madness of Thanatos."⁶⁰

One poem from the volume, "The Triumph of Time," has special relevance for showing Swinburne's reaction to rejection in love. If the poem is autobiographical, as it is thought to be, it likely refers to a marriage proposal to Mary Gordon, his cousin. The proposal and rejection, however, are less important than the speaker's response:

I will go back to the great sweet mother,
 Mother and lover of men, the sea.
 I will go down to her, I and none other,
 Close with her, kiss her and mix her with me;
 Cling to her, strive with her, hold her fast:
 O fair white mother, in days long past
 Born without sister, born without brother,
 Set free my soul as thy soul is free. (I, 177)

Through five additional stanzas, he sings the praises of the sea as his "fair green-girdled mother" and "perfect lover," with whom he desires to mix. The much later (1880) and

definitely autobiographical "Thalassius" (*i. e.*, "From the Sea") recounts his experience with love, which he discovered to be "death in disguise"; Love tells him: "O fool, my name is sorrow; / Thou fool, my name is death" (III, 297). Having learned this bitter lesson, he returns to the sea, his mother, who "purges his soul and restores his faith" and enables him to sing again joyfully.⁶¹ Undoubtedly the most common image in his poetry, the sea is, according to Rosenberg, the subject of his "greatest love poetry."⁶² In poems such as "A Forsaken Garden," "On the Cliffs," "By the North Sea," and "At a Month's End," the sea virtually shapes the lyrical thought. Peckham says that Swinburne found in nature only "one positive symbol, the sea," which provided him with the sense of identity and value. Swimming, in particular, "brings to the surface of the consciousness the body-image, which is, to Swinburne, the profoundest symbolization of the sense of identity." The sea, then, opposes the land, the realm of personality and society where value and identity are not to be found, and occupies the same position in his imagery that style does in his poetry generally.⁶³

More than any other factor, Swinburne's style has made him difficult for modern readers. Alternately irresistible or monotonous, it is invariably "beautiful," setting up a tension in his poetry between aesthetic surface and content. For the poems generally treat disturbing emotional situations (brutality, murder, sexual violations) in extremely seductive and beautiful language. Swinburne had learned, probably from

Baudelaire, that personality and self are two entirely different things; personality is largely the role one plays in society or put another way, the phenomenal self, whereas the self that can only be experienced, not known, is the buried noumenal self, the real self. Personality and society are therefore inextricably bound, and value can be found in neither--they are, to use Peckham's term, "hell." And though the artist cannot find redemption or value there, he must inevitably examine them (along with family and nature, which also compose hell); hell, in other words, furnishes the content of his art. Style, on the other hand, offered the aesthetic poets (or "stylists," as Peckham calls them) a stance from which to view that valueless world while at the same time achieving a sense of identity and selfhood, for style did not so much create order as it symbolized man's power to create order. Art, that is, did not confer order upon the world, but instead conferred selfhood and identity upon the artist; he could not redeem the world but only demonstrate, through his style, the redemption of his selfhood. He achieved this through tradition (learning the essence of styles from the past, such as heroic couplet and blank verse) and a unique use of tradition (making it entirely his own); this mastery of various styles gave him both impersonality (from tradition) and individuality or selfhood (from his unique use of tradition) and gave his art a high degree of aesthetic structure. Art became for him order, meaning, value, in an otherwise chaotic world; in simple terms, it became the source of value, a virtual religion.⁶⁴

Two passages can easily demonstrate Swinburne's special achievement in style. The first, from "Anactoria," expresses Sappho's intense desire for Anactoria; the second, from Tristram, describes the change in the lovers just after they partake of the potion.

Ah that my lips were tuneless lips, but pressed
 To the bruised blossom of thy scourged white breast!
 Ah that my mouth for Muses' milk were fed
 On the sweet blood thy sweet small wounds had bled!
 That with my tongue I felt them, and could taste
 The faint flashes from thy bosom to the waist! (I, 193)

And all their life changed in them, for they quaffed
 Death; if it be death so to drink, and fare
 As men who change and are what these twain were.
 And shuddering with eyes full of fear and fire
 And heart-stung with a serpentine desire
 He turned and saw the terror in her eyes
 That yearned upon him shining in such wise
 As a star midway in the midnight fixed. (IV, 56-57)

Both are written in the heroic couplet, though the iambic pattern is slightly irregular in each case; both demonstrate the beauty of Swinburne's style in the abundance of such devices as alliteration and assonance. But where the earlier "Anactoria" (1866) largely proves Swinburne's mastery of the traditional "strength, conciseness, and lucidity" of the heroic couplet, Tristram makes that form distinctly his own through the "lyrical impetus" imparted to it.⁶⁵ Swinburne transforms the heroic couplet into a vehicle for lyricism primarily by employing run-on lines and introducing or concluding units of thought in the middle, rather than at the end, of the couplet. In its speed and ability to accumulate images and figures, the heroic couplet could hardly be farther removed from its traditional vigor and tightness than it is in Tristram.

And there is another difference between the two poems. "Anactoria," like so many of the poems from Poems and Ballads, deals with unpleasant subject matter, in this case homo-eroticism and blasphemy. The beauty of Swinburne's style, however, has led many readers to believe that he approved and advocated the ugliness revealed in the content of his poems, whereas, in fact, he disapproved of those horrors of personality and society. Style provided him a position from which to observe and expose their failure. Tristram, too, deals with eroticism, but here the subject seems to be beautiful, not ugly, leading readers to see in the poem a lovely and seductive story. Most readers have indeed approved the content. But does Swinburne approve of the eroticism Tristram displays? It is my belief that he does not, that the poem is ironic in that it seems to glorify erotic love but in fact exposes its weakness.

As with "Queen Yseult," the title of the poem, Tristram of Lyonesse, is instructive. Though in a large sense the subject of the poem is love, the fated love of Tristram and Iseult and the jealous love of Iseult of Brittany, in a narrower sense the poem focuses on Tristram as he is buffeted about by the winds of fate, torn between his overwhelming love for Iseult and guilt for the failure of his marriage to Iseult of Brittany. Alone with Iseult, in both the glorious, youthful "Queen's Pleasance" and the sober, more mature "Joyous Gard," he seems completely fulfilled, at one with himself and the world; alone with his wife, in "The Maiden

Marriage," he is miserable, guilt-ridden. But happy as he seems with Iseult, he achieves no real sense of identity; rather his identity depends on her confirmation of it. Only once, when he is alone, does Tristram achieve any real sense of identity and selfhood--in the matchless passage of "The Last Pilgrimage" where his very being first vibrates to the call of the sea and he then plunges naked into the waves:

And Tristram with the first pale windy light
 Woke ere the sun spake summons, and his ear
 Caught the sea's call that fired his heart to hear,
 A noise of waking waters . . .
 . . . and with joy
 Full-souled and perfect passion, as a boy
 That leaps up light to wrestle with the sea
 For pure heart's gladness and large ecstasy,
 Up sprang the might of Tristram . . .
 . . . and the heart
 Trembled for joy within the man whose part
 Was here not least in living; and his mind
 Was rapt abroad beyond man's meaner kind
 And pierced with love of all things and with mirth
 Moved to make one with heaven and heavenlike earth
 And with the light live water. (IV, 142-43)

After breathing in the spirit of the sea, his body and soul quivering with joy, he leaps:

. . . with a cry of love that rang
 As from a trumpet golden-mouthed, he sprang,
 As toward a mother's where his head might rest
 Her child rejoicing, toward the strong sea's breast
 That none may gird nor measure: and his heart
 Sent forth a shout that bade his lips not part,
 But triumphed in him silent: no man's voice,
 No song, no sound of clarions that rejoice,
 Can set that glory forth which fills with fire
 The body and soul that have their whole desire
 Silent, and freer than birds or dreams are free
 Take all their will of all the encountering sea. (IV, 144)

As he swims, "each glad limb" becomes "A note of rapture in the tune of life, / Live music mild and keen as sleep and

strife" (IV, 144).

The passage, which continues for four pages, provides the key to the poem. Tristram does not, like Wagner's Tristan, perceive intellectually the illusion of eroticism; he instead achieves an intuitive awareness of self and identity as he experiences value. The whole experience is so profound that he cannot articulate its meaning; his heart sends forth a silent shout as body and soul "have their whole desire / Silent" in taking their will of the sea. His whole being finds fulfillment in the sea, in the act of swimming, and it is significant that Iseult, whom he forgets altogether, plays no part in that fulfillment. The true believer in erotic love as a transcendent force can confirm his being only with the aid of the beloved. Tristram transcends that limitation to the perception of one's own identity and thereby unconsciously reveals erotic love to be an illusion.

The sea is the vehicle which permits this intuitive perception. In Swinburne's poetry the sea serves many functions. It may symbolize escape from love and society and the role one plays in society, as in "The Triumph of Time"; the rejuvenation of life, as in "Thalassius"; destruction, as in "By the North Sea" and "A Forsaken Garden." Even in Tristram it symbolizes various things: rapture and passion in "The Sailing of the Swallow"; peace and calm in "The Queen's Pleasance"; doom and judgment in "Iseult at Tintagel"; and death and destruction in "The Sailing of the Swan." But chiefly, as both Chew and

Peckham note, it symbolizes freedom or liberty, not only the love of liberty but freedom to be oneself, to discover oneself, away from the pressures and restrictions of society.⁶⁶ Peckham puts it nicely: "The sea makes possible a separation from society and personality . . . In the sea the swimmer is aware only of his identity, which is confirmed by the even contact between the water and the surface of the naked body." Further, the swimmer "can gaze down into the depths of the sea, where wrecks and skeletons image their proper fate."⁶⁷

So as the swimmer becomes aware of value and identity, he also may glimpse images of man's final fate, to be swallowed up in oblivion. This points directly toward the conclusion of Tristram, where, after Mark has the lovers buried in a chapel at Tintagel, the sea pronounces the final doom by inundating the chapel and claiming them for its own:

For the strong sea hath swallowed wall and tower,
And where their limbs were laid in woful hour
For many a fathom gleams and moves and moans
The tide that sweeps above their coffined
bones . . . (IV, 167)

And the poem ends on the note of peace and "perpetual rest" (IV, 165), to which they have been delivered:

But peace they have that none may gain who live,
And rest about them that no love can give,
And over them, while life and death shall be,
The light and sound and darkness of the sea. (IV, 168)

Tristram and Iseult indeed find peace and rest in death, but Swinburne posits nothing beyond death, though he speculates on life after death, on transcendence of time and death (IV, 151-52) as do the lovers (IV, 116-20). At best he sees

transcendence as merely a possibility; he rests his case not on asserting that value resides in a transcendent realm but in experiencing meaning and value in this life. Swinburne achieves that value and sense of identity in his art, his hero in the act of swimming.

Man's sure fate, then, is death. But Fate, which he invokes at the beginning of "The Sailing of the Swan," is more than just death. It is a force beyond and higher than godhead, lord of all things except the soul of man. Basically it is presented as a force which unifies contraries as, for example, it "smites and soothes with heavy and healing hand / All joys and sorrows born in life's dim land, / Till joy be found a shadow and sorrow a breath / And life no discard in the tune with death"; it is a power "which puts on / All forms of multitudinous unison" and in which "one deep chord throbs all the music through, / The chord of change unchanging" (IV, 150). In making fate the lord of all things except the soul of man, Swinburne allows for two things: first, the outside possibility of transcendence, which he nevertheless refuses to assert; second, and more significant, the possibility that when the whole soul of man comes into being, when it harmonizes completely with the body, as with Tristram, man may break through the illusions which personality, society, and nature force upon him. For this is fate itself, the deep chord of "change unchanging" for all men--to be born into a world which seems to offer value and meaning in the form of personality, society, and nature. Fate is, in short, this whole complex of forces which both

subdue man and sustain him, for they furnish the illusions which he lives by. Swinburne, living as he did at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, knew the failure of the enlightenment, romanticism, and transcendentalism; he knew, that is, that value was not to be found in an "enlightened" society, that nature could not redeem man, and that man (society) could not be redeemed by transcendental love. These illusions had been shattered. But one transcendental notion had penetrated deeply into society, though it operated at the level of personality--the idea that erotic love might redeem the individual. It is the loveliest of the world's illusions, as Kurwenal recognized in Wagner's Tristan, and in Swinburne fate decrees that man shall be tempted by it, that he may indeed succumb to it.

Swinburne paints the beauty of erotic love with masterful strokes in "The Prelude," a hymn to love:

Love, that is first and last of all things made,
 The light that has the living world for shade, . . .
 Love, that is flesh upon the spirit of man
 And spirit within the flesh whence breath began;
 Love, that keeps all the choir of lives in chime;
 Love, that is blood within the veins of time; . . .
 That binds on all men's feet or chains or wings;
 Love, that is root and fruit of terrene things; . . .
 So strong that heaven, could love bid heaven farewell,
 Would turn to fruitless and unflowering hell;
 So sweet that hell, to hell could love be given,
 Would turn to splendid and sonorous heaven. (IV, 25-26)

He ascribes to love a spiritual quality and goes on to suggest that Tristram and Isolt do achieve immortality, for love has led them "to the lifeless life of night" and "further yet / Out through the years where memories rise and set (IV, 26).

These lines, of course, echo Wagner, but the clearest echo comes in a later passage:

They have the night, who had like us the day;
We, whom day binds, shall have the night as
 they . . .
Blind is the day and eyeless all its light,
But the unbewildered eye of night
Hath sense and speculation. (IV, 31)

These two tenets, a belief in the spirituality of love and faith in the power of love to transcend death, form the basic creed of those who believe in erotic, transcendental love, of whom, at this point, Swinburne seems to be a member. He marshals further evidence for such a belief in the calendar of constellations which he sets up for the twelve months (IV, 28-29). Named for immortal female lovers (Helen--January; Iseult--April; Cleopatra--August; Guenevere--December) and identified with the sun, they actually suggest a calendar of saints who have achieved immortality through erotic love. In effect they merely offer possibilities to the believer, who may substitute his own calendar of lovers.

At this point it is necessary to pause and reflect on the contradictions involved in "The Prelude" and the conclusion to Tristram. Unquestionably there is a great disparity, for "The Prelude" sings with lyric fervor the glories of erotic love, while the conclusion consigns the lovers to oblivion; indeed, as Rosenberg points out, the lovers suffer a double doom as the sea ravages their first burial site and buries them anew.⁶⁸ It is helpful to remember here that Swinburne wrote "The Prelude," beginning in 1869, more than ten years

before he returned seriously to the narrative in 1881 and published it as a separate poem in 1871. Taken by itself, it is a masterful lyric, but it seems, as Fuller points out, to bear little relation to the narrative which follows.⁶⁹ Perhaps the problem lies in the different modes employed--lyrical for "The Prelude" and narrative for the remainder of the poem. Perhaps the difficulty inherent in portraying erotic love as transcendental in an actual setting delayed the composition of the narrative for some thirteen years; perhaps, finally, his surer instincts guaranteed that, despite the idyllic introductory hymn, love could not be apotheosized. At any rate, it is difficult to make "The Prelude" gloss the entire poem. From one point of view, such disparity can be seen as a serious flaw in artistry, the poet promising something which he does not deliver. From another, if one grants that Swinburne was pleased with the poem (as his letters indicate)⁷⁰ and intended the disparity, the basic effect is to increase the irony manifested in the narrative. For in simple terms this is what he does: he dramatizes a magnificent vista of transcendental love only to show later that it leads to oblivion.

Until the climactic scene of Tristram swimming in the sea, love is generally painted in glowing colors, though it does not lead to peace. Just before Tristram and Iseult partake of the potion, Swinburne strikes a note of warning: he says that this is to be "The last hour of their hurtless hearts at rest, / The last that peace should touch them breast to breast, / The

last that sorrow far from them should sit, / This last was with them, and they knew not it" (IV, 55). Immediately following the drink, they experience their first rapture in a memorable image:

Their heads neared, and their hands were drawn
 in one,
 And they saw dark, though still the unsunken sun
 Far through fine rain shot fire into the south;
 And their four lips became one burning mouth. (IV, 57)

Only once do they appear to attain any real peace, in "The Queen's Pleasance," to which they elope after Tristram rescues Iseult from Palamede. For three months they reside in the bower without sorrow or "thought of sorrow," as "queen and king / Crowned of a kingdom wide as day and night" (IV, 67, 68). Here the earth fosters them "like her babes of eldest birth" (IV, 68), and they have, in fact, a youthful innocence surpassing that of Adam and Eve. Though nature rejoices in their love, they are basically oblivious to it, so much are they devoted to each other. Time has no meaning for them, and death and change are mere rumors (IV, 67-69). "The Queen's Pleasance" is, in short, a bower of bliss. But time and change work their inexorable will, and the lovers are discovered sleeping, the sword between them (IV, 87).

At "Joyous Gard," the site of their final rendezvous, love, though it does not lessen, deepens and darkens in color. Having experienced the agonies of separation and loneliness, Tristram and Iseult know the meaning of time and change and speculate even on the meaning of death and immortality. The natural scene which forms the backdrop for their meeting reflects

the gravity of their love and hints of their forthcoming tragedy: "Between the wild sea and the broad wild lands," on the "utmost margin of the loud lone sea" (IV, 111, 109), they enjoy their final moments together. When Iseult declares that she is not like the wondrous Nimue, that she (Iseult) has given Tristram only "Peril and sleepless watches . . . Exile, rebuke, remorse" (IV, 118), he responds that she has instead given him life: "The shadow of death, informed with shows of strife, / Was ere I won thee all I had of life" (IV, 118). "Joyous Gard" is as much a meditation on life and death and the possibility of life beyond death as it is a tale of love. But the seriousness which informs their view of life, love, and death in no way diminishes their love: "Nor loved they life or love for death's sake less, / Nor feared they death for love of life's sake more" (IV, 120).

Through this point in the narrative, Tristram and Iseult are dependent on each other to confirm their identities. Tristram, without Iseult, is miserable in his wanderings and his marriage; Iseult, without Tristram, is wretched, merely existing with Mark. Each needs the other not for the other's sake but for his own. The physical violations of the lovers in Poems and Ballads are thus replaced by psychological violations in the fulfilled love of Tristram and Iseult, for each exploits the other, placing over the beloved a self-created mask that enables one to see only oneself. Even in fulfilled erotic love, then, the lover plays a role demanded not by society but by personality, for he operates under the

notion that his being can be confirmed only by another--a notion which demands that he project an image onto the beloved, the image in turn sustaining and affirming him. From the recesses of the personality also come, according to Peckham, man's projections into the figure of God.⁷¹ The prayers of the two Iseults illustrate this vividly.

In many ways the most moving section of the poem, "Iseult at Tintagel" records the shifting moods of Iseult in prayer. As Mark revels downstairs and the seas and winds rage outside, she refuses to repent of her love for Tristram, which she confesses to be greater than her love of God; instead, she first prays that Tristram may gain eternal salvation even if that means eternal damnation for herself. Then the prayer changes rapidly from one appeal to another: for Tristram's immediate return to her; for one hour of reunion with him at an unspecified time, however remote; again for his pardon at her expense; and finally for their reunion, if not on earth, then beyond in either heaven or hell (IV, 96-104). Because she suffers the torments of loneliness, desire, and guilt, she appeals to a God who has likewise suffered:

Christ, if thou hear yet or have eyes to see,
Thou that hadst pity, and hast no pity on me,
Know'st thou no more, as in this life's sharp span,
What pain thou hadst on earth, what pain hath man?
Hast thou no care, that all we suffer yet? (IV, 101, 102)

She further appeals to God as a God of mercy (IV, 103) and forgiveness and love, "born of woman, of a maid," who knows the anguish of the flesh, having once been clad in flesh

himself (IV, 95). Her prayer is powerful, moving, and paradoxical. From one point of view, it seems very unselfish, especially in her high regard for Tristram's soul; from another, it is equally selfish, beseeching God to grant her, even at the price of her own soul, only that which fulfills her concept of self. She cannot conceive of her self without Tristram either in life or in death. It is interesting also to note that part of the prayer is actually addressed to Tristram (IV, 99-100) as she reflects on their love and wonders if he has repented. A too cursory reading of the prayer may indeed cause the careless reader to confuse the "thou's" addressed to God with those spoken to Tristram. The final effect of the prayer is that of a suffering Iseult, in need of mercy and the love of Tristram, praying to a God into whom she projects those very qualities; in her case, God is as loving and merciful as she, for He is the projection of her deepest will.

The God Iseult of the White Hands appeals to, however, is vastly different. He is a God of wrath and vengeance, a stern judge, much like the Old Testament God of "an eye for an eye." Her prayer reflects the bitterness, jealousy, and wrath she experiences at being betrayed and forsaken by Tristram. She is vengeful and prays to a vengeful God; in fact, she prays to become his agent or instrument of destruction that she may wreak vengeance on Tristram and Iseult:

O long-suffering judge, how long?
 Shalt thou not put him in mine hand one day
 Whom I so loved, to spare not but to slay?
 Shalt thou not cast her down for me to tread,
 Me, on the pale pride of humbled head? . . .
 Make me thy sword
 At least, if even thou too be wronged, O Lord,
 At all of these that wrong me: make mine hand
 As lightning, or my tongue a fiery brand,
 To burn or smite them with thy wrath . . . (IV, 124-25, 126)

Obsessed by hatred, Iseult of Brittany occupies in this poem much the same position as Mark in "Queen Yseult," who if not entirely understanding in Tristram is at least much kinder than she. She betrays, in addition, the weakness of eroticism, for she too needs Tristram to confirm her identity in love. Not gaining that confirmation, she takes refuge in legalistic moral conventions and seeks to destroy both her husband and her rival. In her destructiveness, she recalls the femmes fatales of Poems and Ballads but with the added horror that she destroys in the name of Christianity. She is, as McSweeney notes,⁷² a strict moralist and self-righteous besides: "For is it I, perchance, I that have sinned?" (IV, 125). Like Queen Iseult, she asks for only one hour of Tristram's life, but for her own vindictive purposes, that she may triumph over him (IV, 128). Though her God is so very different from Queen Iseult's, He bears the same psychological equivalence to her as Iseult's does; they both, in one sense, create God out of the deepest drives of their personalities. Their Gods reflect themselves and feed their fires of love and suffering, hate and vengeance.

And both prayers are answered. Queen Iseult not only has

Tristram's love in Joyous Gard but also lies beside him in death. The Breton Iseult shares the last hours of Tristram's life and with her lie causes his death, actually identifying herself as death (IV, 162). Neither ever reaches the awareness of self and identity which Tristram achieves just before receiving his fatal wound. Even he returns to the illusion of erotic love on his deathbed as he calls for Iseult: "Come therefore, let us twain pass hence and try / If it be better not to live but die, / With love for lamp to light us out of life" (IV, 161). But so does Wagner's Tristan; after he penetrates the "world's fairest illusion," he still yearns to see Isolde. Swinburne's hero never achieves quite the same understanding of erotic love as Wagner's; his Tristram achieves an intuitive, Wagner's an intellectual, awareness of the weakness and failure of erotic love. To penetrate an illusion, intellectually or intuitively, does not, however, guarantee that one will never be seduced by it again. What it does guarantee is a temporary experience of value, order, and meaning, an experience, fleeting as it may be, that is almost visionary in its impact. And that experience is sufficient, much as it is for Browning's Abt Vogler, whose visionary palace of music vanishes but whose intuitive perception convinces him of its truth--it is enough that he heard the music once. Just as Vogler returns to the "C major of this life," so does Swinburne's Tristram after his momentary experience of value and identity. It is not remarkable, then, that he should again feel the power of the illusion of erotic love in his

dying hours. It is in man's nature to wish to cling to illusions, even when he knows their weaknesses, and perhaps never so much as in his dying hours. What matters is that Tristram once--divorced from the land, symbolic of personality and society, which are one--discovered his true self.

Even in this reading of the poem, however, Swinburne obviously sympathizes with the lovers. He may expose the illusion which governs them and which Tristram penetrates; but that does not mean that he castigates the lovers, as do Tennyson explicitly and Arnold implicitly. In fact, the tone and content of the poem betray the attractiveness of the illusion for Swinburne himself, though he knew it was only an illusion (as his conclusion proves). Here there is none of the tension between style and content which informs Poems and Ballads, but there is added irony in the beautiful exposure of a beautiful illusion. Only twice in the poem does the aesthetic surface mask any real horrors of personality, in Iseult of Brittany's prayer and her vigil over the dying Tristram. Otherwise, the incidents of the poem are indeed "pretty," as Swinburne intended them to be.

For Swinburne, value lies in art itself, not in the message which it may proclaim. Through art, and particularly through the style he forged, he symbolizes his own individuality. His one basic attempt is, like that of the aesthetes generally, to create beauty, not to redeem or to teach man. Through a highly structured self, symbolized by style,⁷³ he presents to the reader an experience of value; but he in no way seeks to

inculcate morality into his audience. In Tristram, for instance, one can clearly see that the poet sympathizes with the lovers, but it would be extremely difficult, virtually impossible, to derive any moral from the poem. Rather Swinburne reveals the beauty of eroticism and then demonstrates, through Tristram, its inadequacies. He nowhere rails against erotic love, nor does he, if the ironic reading I propose is valid, approve it. Value for Swinburne lies in the beautiful presentation of the story.

This contrasts sharply, of course, with the moralistic views of Arnold and Tennyson. For them value lay, among other places, in the Victorian cult of married love, and they viewed the Tristram legend accordingly. There is a subdued, static beauty in Arnold's presentation of the lovers, but his distrust of erotic love erupts in his condemnation of "this fool passion" near the end of his poem. Tennyson roundly condemns eroticism throughout the Idylls and most explicitly in the characters of Tristram and Iseult. But Swinburne would have considered married love an illusion as well, insofar as it promised to rescue the individual from eroticism and save society. And the legend offered him ample proof, for marriage rescues none of the characters, including Iseult of Brittany, from eroticism, either adulterous or legitimate. In fact, if Iseult of Brittany may be regarded as its representative, married love may be even more destructive than adulterous love. Which is to say that each artist chose from the wealth of source material only that which suited his own purposes; Tennyson and Arnold deliberately

avoided the romantic ending of the sails, for example, because it would have worked against their interpretation of Iseult of the White Hands as a patient, loving wife. Swinburne, with that ending, avoids the domesticity and sentimentality of Arnold, on the one hand, and the brutality of Tennyson on the other. He sees art, not love, as the source of value, as the only thing which, because free of illusion, can confer identity and value on man by presenting him an experience of meaning and value and thereby enabling him to redeem himself. His response, though no more valid than Tennyson's or Arnold's, is a welcome change from the didactic; that it differs so radically from their versions merely attests to the vitality of the legend, whatever the current conceptions and purposes of art.

Symons' Tristan and Iseult and "Iseult of Brittany"

For Arthur Symons, too, art should eschew the moral and seek only the beautiful. In the "Prologue" to his first volume of poems, Days and Nights (1899), he indicates that art has nothing to do with lectures or sermons:

With equal feet she /Art/ treads an equal path,
Nor recks the goings of the sons of men;
She hath for sin no scorn, for wrong no wrath,
No praise for virtue, and no tears for pain.⁷⁴

Later, in an essay entitled "A Paradox on Art" (1902), he states that "Art is the creation of beauty in form, visible or audible, and the artist is the creator of beauty in visible or audible forms. . . . Art has to do only with the creation of beauty, whether it be in words, or sounds, or colour, or outline, or

rhythmical movement."⁷⁵

It is only natural, then, that when he came to write his verse drama Tristan and Iseult he would, like Swinburne, emphasize the "beautiful" aspects of the legend. Exactly when he began the play is not clear, but Lhombreaud says he completed it in 1903.⁷⁶ By that time, his theories of art were rather well fixed, for he had moved away from the impressionism of Silhouettes (1892) and London Nights (1895) to symbolism--or at least an attempt at symbolism--in Images of Good and Evil (1899) and The Loom of Dreams (1901). In these latter volumes he was attempting to create poetry in the vein of the French Symbolists, whom he had praised in The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899), his chief critical work. He was trying, that is, to penetrate to the essence of things or ideas, to apprehend the invisible world through symbols which obviated discursive thinking.⁷⁷ That he failed to achieve in his poetry what he understood thoroughly in theory is almost a cliché of modern criticism. Some of his poems, such as "The Dance of the Seven Sins" and the "Prologue" to The Loom of Dreams suggest in their tone and imagery symbolist poetry, but he never achieved the concentrated feeling of Verlaine, whom he idolized. One problem was his attraction to the visible, material world. He recognized the necessity to apprehend the spiritual, invisible world and to evoke it in terms of the visible, but as Munro points out (quoting Gautier), Symons was always something of a sensualist, "'a man for whom the visible world exists.'"⁷⁸ And his poetry never quite overcame the descriptive, discursive

element symbolist poetry abhorred.

In Tristan and Iseult, too, he employed the symbolist technique. Though Priscilla Thouless accords him high praise on this score,⁷⁹ the play is at best uneven and certainly does not leave one with a final impression of symbolist art. Thouless points to one passage which best expresses the symbolist technique; it occurs just after the lovers have drunk the potion. Iseult speaks:

What is it that has set me free? I feel
As if a boundless joy had given me wings:
I am as universal as the sun.
Look, Tristan, there is nothing here but light:
Light in the sky, light in the hollow sea,
The encircling and caressing light of the air!
Light eats into my flesh and drinks me up:
I am a cup for the immense thirst of light,
I cannot see you, Tristan, for the light.⁸⁰

Here Symons captures the effect of love on Iseult--one might say the very essence of love--through the imagery of light, which not only sets her free but consumes and dazzles and even blinds her to everything but love. Elsewhere, however, such imagery is rare and never as intense or sustained as here.

Because symbolism values "moments" of high intensity, of highly charged emotion, it functions best in short lyrics and worst in long narrative poems, perhaps worst of all in long dramas where exposition and a semblance of logical discourse are necessary for a meaningful development of theme and for communication with the audience. Yeats's short plays, such as Deirdre and At the Hawk's Well, go perhaps as far as possible toward a purely symbolist drama in their evocation of the intense individual emotion of the moment. But Symons' problem was

different in Tristan. He had to wrestle with a much longer story which demanded that he seize on several intense "moments." What he did (except in Act I, which occurs in Ireland and focuses on the "discovery" of Tristan) was to imitate Wagner: Act II centers on the drinking of the love potion; Act III, on the liebesnacht; and Act IV, on Tristan dying in Brittany. Of these four "moments," only the second one approximates symbolist drama.

Act I takes place in the palace of the King of Ireland. Tristan is introduced into a rather domestic scene, in which Iseult of Brittany, cousin of Princess Iseult, is weaving while the Queen and the Princess are discussing with Meriadoc, another cousin of the Princess, the vengeance they expect to wreak on the killer of Morolt, Meriadoc's father and the Queen's brother. When Princess Iseult takes Tristan's sword and promptly discovers him to be the villain by the missing notch, Meriadoc is ready to strike him dead. By such an act, he will endear himself to the Princess, whom he loves. But the Queen stays their hands, gives Tristan audience, and learns that he has come to seek the Princess' hand in marriage to Mark. In consultation with the King, they decide--particularly the Queen--that the match shall be made to unite the two kingdoms, but Princess Iseult is angered, considering herself a pawn in their hands, a prisoner of their wills. Act II focuses on the voyage from Ireland to Cornwall and the drinking of the love potion. Although Iseult is convinced that Tristan is her jailer and that she is going to prison rather than to a new kingdom,

she commands Meriadoc not to harm him. A child, rather than Brangaene, brings the potion so that the lovers may seal their covenant of forgetfulness and be friends. Act III, the liebesnacht, occurs against a backdrop of night and sea. Mark, not really wanting to believe the informer Melot, agrees to see for himself whether there is any truth to the rumor that Tristan and Iseult are meeting clandestinely. When he discovers them, Tristan meekly submits to his banishment; but Iseult verbally challenges the King and strongly defends their affair. In Act IV Tristan lies dying from a wound inflicted by Meriadoc; his wife, Iseult of Brittany, watches by his bedside. When she learns from one of her ladies in attendance that Tristan has sent not for a physician but for her cousin, she suffers torments of jealousy and debates what to do if the sail should be white. It is, and she lies, whereupon Tristan dies and she instantly experiences remorse, with suggestions that her mind may indeed have snapped during this crisis. Iseult arrives, lies beside Tristan, and dies; Mark arrives, seeking vengeance, but discovering the truth, has their bodies taken to Tintagel for burial.

For sources Symons followed Gottfried, according to Lhombreaud,⁸¹ but one suspects that his immediate source was Wagner, primarily because the last three acts, as noted above, treat the same events as Wagner's three-act opera. Though there is no record that he ever attended a performance of the opera, Symons undoubtedly was familiar with Wagner's version of the legend, for by the time he began his play, Wagner and his

opera had long been the rage of Europe. Symons learned to play some of Wagner by 1880;⁸² further discovered Wagner and Tristan in his study of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Huysmans, who were devotees of Wagner;⁸³ knew Beardsley's drawings of Tristan; and wrote essays on Wagner in Plays, Acting and Music (1903) and Studies in Seven Arts (1906). However, Lhombreaud's claim that Symons followed Gottfried gains credibility in light of one distinctive feature of the play: Symons' inclusion of Iseult of Brittany and Tristan's marriage to her. Wagner, it will be remembered, omitted the second Iseult. Another feature, the omission of the Arthurian material, points both to Wagner and beyond him to Gottfried. All three--Gottfried, Wagner, and Symons--generally dismiss the Arthurian connection in order to concentrate solely on the theme of love.

As drama, Tristan has problems (to be considered throughout this discussion), but considering Symons' contributions to the legend, it is a bit surprising that his version has elicited so little response. When it was finally published in 1917, it drew little notice, even from the reviewers; those who did comment, such as the New York Times Book Review, generally praised the play but actually did little except summarize it.⁸⁴ Since that time, critics of Symons have paid scant notice to Tristan, never bothering to analyze it. Only Thouless and Ziemann discuss the play at length, but the former considers it only for symbolist qualities while the latter indulges chiefly in summary and character analysis.⁸⁵ On several counts, however, Symons' rendition of the legend deserves careful attention:

for his complication of the love story through ties of blood, his characterization of Iseult as strong-willed and Tristan as submissive, and his generally sympathetic portrayal of all the major characters. Together, these features lead to what I consider the major idea of the play--the divisiveness and conflict, both internal and external, generated by love.

Certainly the most unusual aspect of the play is Symons' introduction of Iseult of Brittany into the first scene as the cousin of Iseult of Ireland. In all previous versions, she enters Tristan's life, if at all, near its conclusion and never as a relative of her rival. Before Tristan enters the scene, there is already a repressed rivalry between the cousins, as evidenced by their reactions toward the poisoned dagger; Iseult of Ireland takes it boldly and would kill the murderer of her uncle Morolt, but Iseult of Brittany, calling her "My manly hearted cousin," says she should toss it into the sea (p. 13). When Tristan is discovered to be the culprit, the Breton Iseult defends him against her cousin and Meriadoc (pp. 20, 21). Before the first act is over, both Iseults have obviously fallen in love with Tristan, though neither quite understands what has happened. Tristan's mere presence thus sharpens their rivalry. And though Iseult of Ireland easily dominates her cousin, the rivalry contains the seeds of open hostility and future destruction.

But there is another family complication. Meriadoc, the son of Morolt, loves his cousin Iseult of Ireland. She clearly feels nothing for him and not only mocks his advances but subdues

him as easily as she does her female cousin. She commands him twice to contain his rage against Tristan. The first time (Act I, p. 21) she is determined to wreak vengeance herself; the second (Act II, pp. 40-41) she declares that though she hates Tristan he must live as "long as he keeps faith with his own word" and "with me." Disgruntled and morose before, Meriadoc now finds further reason to hate Tristan in Iseult's frustration of his desire to kill him. His bitterness and hostility can only increase when Tristan and Iseult become lovers. Symons thus establishes another hostile relationship by pitting the nephews of two royal families against each other, and this one leads to mortal combat.

Enough has been said already to suggest the role that Iseult of Ireland plays in the drama. Strong-willed and independent, she masters virtually everyone around her except her mother. True, she is curious about love, as her questions to Tristan indicate (p. 18), but decidedly more determined to forge her own identity with or without love. She acknowledges that a woman could die for love and more than die--she could kill (p. 19). When the Queen speaks of her enviable position in marrying Mark, Iseult retorts: "Mother, you do wrong to women. I have known / A woman who would have had gladlier / A shepherd's apple from a shepherd's hand / Than crowns from shaking fingers" (p. 27). Unhappy with the decision made for her to marry Mark, she is, by the end of Act I, being pulled in three different directions: by Mark and the promise of

peace between the kingdoms of Ireland and Cornwall; by Meriadoc and the family loyalty which demands vengeance; and by Tristan and the inexplicable force of love, which she does not yet fully understand. She has apparently felt the first vague stirrings of love, however, for she asks her mother:

What shall we do mother? O mother, tell me
 Why could I not kill Tristan? I had the will,
 And it was not your hand that stayed my hand . . .
 Why is it that my eyes follow his eyes,
 As a hound follows his master? (p. 22)

But she does not yield easily to any of these forces; in fact, she scorns Mark (whom she has not seen), forces Meriadoc to swear that he will not harm Tristan, and commands Tristan to attend her presence and to drink with her forgetfulness of their enmity (pp. 37-42, 47). Only once in the play does she hesitate or falter: just after drinking the potion and rhapsodizing on the freedom which love brings, she suddenly draws back:

O what is love, and why is love so bitter
 After the blinding sweetness of a moment?
 I am afraid, I am afraid of love.
 This is some death that has got hold on me;
 The night is coming back into my soul.
 Tristan, I am afraid. If this is love,
 I am afraid of the intolerable love. (p. 51)

Though she quickly ceases her questioning and reconciles herself to love, her hesitation suggests that she recognizes the paradox of her situation: despite the freedom which love seems to confer upon her, she is no longer free to chart her own destiny. For the first time she recognizes and must submit to a force stronger than herself; thus the fear that death "has got hold on me." When challenged by others, however, she regains

her old imperiousness and independence. She repudiates Brangaene's warnings of death and evil tidings by summoning the child who brought the cup and kissing the child's hands (pp. 55-56). In Act III, she defends herself and Tristan against Mark and charges that Mark dragged his "own honour in the dust" (p. 79) by exposing the lovers before the lords of the court; when Mark banishes Tristan, she demands that Tristan kill him (p. 80). Finally, in Act IV, when Iseult of Brittany claims that she killed Tristan by lying, the Irish Iseult, in an ambiguous line perhaps meant to comfort but possibly to mock her, declares: "You have done nothing in this mighty death" (p. 106). Even in the final scene, then, she takes the upper hand, determined that her rival shall not take undue credit for Tristan's death. Her domination of others recalls the youthful Swinburne's "Queen Yseult," but Symons' Iseult depends less upon physical strength and more upon strength of mind and will than Swinburne's. It is to Symons's credit, besides, that he could execute a full and basically sympathetic portrait of such a strong-minded woman. His Iseult is, in short, a "New Woman," a type which began to emerge in late nineteenth-century fiction, in the novels of Hardy and Grant Allen for instance.⁸⁶ Her independence, intelligence, and freedom from the conventions of Victorian womanhood, such as meekness and dependence, make her the most vital, realistic character in the play.

Tristan, on the other hand, is basically a submissive

character. Twice, once in Act I and again in Act II, he indicates that he, unlike Iseult, is controlled by a will other than his own--the sea's: "I have no other will than the sea's" (p. 16), and later, "I have always done what the sea would" (p. 43). His entire destiny seems shaped by the sea: his two voyages to Ireland where he meets Iseult; the quaffing of the potion aboard ship; the white and black sails episode. And he accepts that destiny without question. But he submits to other wills as readily as the sea's. In the scene where Iseult hesitates, he surrenders easily to love, remarking that "from this moment we have done / With being happy or unhappy"; for him, "this thing must be endured" (p. 51). Conscience-stricken by his disloyalty to Mark, he yields easily to Mark's judgment in banishing him and is virtually emasculated in Mark's symbolic act of breaking his sword (p. 80). Symons, however, has prepared the reader for his willing submission to Mark. Before they are discovered by Mark and Melot, the lovers engage in a verbal duel which sharply defines their characters. The subject is love and honor, and momentarily at least the emphasis shifts from passion to a problem in personal ethics, the concept of self:

Iseult: Love is a sword, and the sword severs friends;
 Love is a fire and burns all lesser things.
 Love is not love
 Unless it root up honour like a weed.

Tristan: Love is not love unless it honour honour
 Above all mortal things.

Iseult: There is a thing
 Which is the faith of love: I know none else, . . .

Tristan: Only now a wind
 Has put my honour out, as a wind blows
 A candle out, and all the room is dark.

Iseult: Why will you cry that barren bastard word
 Honour? . . .
 I have not sinned against the honour of
 love. (pp. 72-73)

Echoing Lovelace's speaker in "To Lucasta, Going to the Wars" but exhibiting an inner tension which that speaker does not, Tristan surrenders, albeit with a troubled soul, to Iseult and love. Iseult, having reconciled herself to the power of love, acknowledges little else; Tristan, having yielded easily to love, becomes a divided being, torn between honor in friendship and honor in love. His strength lies in his weakness; that is, his division renders him weak when pitted against extremely strong-willed and opinionated characters but at the same time gives him a depth and complexity of character which the others lack. His submissive quality, then, actually complicates rather than simplifies his character. Later, in the final scene, he does not vacillate in his longing to see Iseult, but Iseult of Brittany, of course, thwarts his desire. It would seem that only the thought of his approaching death enables him to resolve his inner conflict and to focus on the most meaningful person in his life. But it is also possible that the very fear of death forces his resolution, for he is confident that if Iseult comes he will be saved (p. 97). Whichever the real motive, he does not swerve from his final submission to love, the most significant force in life, but dies blessing Iseult (p. 103).

Individualistic as she is, Iseult likewise gives all for love; though her dying beside Tristan achieves neither the ecstasy of Wagner nor the tenderness of Swinburne, it measures adequately the strength of her devotion to love. In following the traditional romantic ending of the legend, Symons obviously betrays a deep sympathy for the lovers. But he displays as well a tender regard for both Iseult of Brittany and Mark. In fact, one of the problems of the play--perhaps the major problem--is an apparent weakness in intention. By portraying all the major characters with deep compassion, he enlists audience sympathy so that the reader or viewer wishes to see no one hurt. Undoubtedly many people familiar with the legend have felt a like sympathy for the two Iseults, Tristan, and Mark; the only trouble is that such a feeling does not make for good drama. Perhaps in the creation of Meriadoc, the villain of the play, Symons hoped to drain off any negative feelings engendered by the clash of other characters, but again there is a problem. A peripheral character, Meriadoc scarcely figures in the real drama of love. He loves Iseult, it is true, but is spurned in that love; in addition, he inflicts the mortal wound on Tristan, whether out of vengeance for Morolt's death or jealousy of Tristan and Iseult--or, more likely, both--is unclear. If he attacks Tristan out of jealousy, as the dying Tristan indicates (p. 100), there is an additional problem, for though Tristan possesses Iseult's heart, he has not seen her since his banishment (at least there is no evidence for such in the play); he has

been as effectively banished from her presence as Meriadoc from her heart. Iseult at this time lives with Mark, and it must be remembered that her mother and father, not Tristan, sealed that relationship. A lingering, smoldering jealousy may have prompted Meriadoc's attack, or perhaps Symons was so enamoured of the idea of two nephews of royal houses confronting each other that he failed to detect any weakness in motivation. At any rate, a drama centering on the turbulent relationship and love of the four major characters requires something more than a basic approval of them by the insertion of a stock villain.

Mark enters the play in Act III as the recipient of news from Melot, his fool, that Tristan and Iseult have been meeting clandestinely. He eventually consents to test Melot's rumor to determine if it is accurate but not before experiencing some real anguish. He does not want to believe the report, preferring instead to doubt himself and to trust the two people whom he loves most in the world:

If this thing be true
Which cannot be, or there's an end of truth,
Yet may be true, and then, why, Tristan's dead.
Not a word more, Melot; he was my sword:
Swords may dig graves; but yet it is not true . . .
No, no, I'll not believe it: if it be,
These two have done dishonour on their souls
Deep as my hurt, deeper than any hurt . . .
I wrong myself
Even to doubt. I should not hear your words. (p. 65)

Still, he is troubled, as indicated by his pacing back and forth during this speech. And as Melot informs him how the lovers may be apprehended, he becomes so disturbed that he imagines a scene of slaughter in which he murders the lovers and then

commits suicide (p. 67). When Melot tries to get him to swear against taking his own life, he confesses his bewilderment: "I speak / I know not what" (p. 67). He is not, of course, so brutal in the discovery scene; but he is harsh and a bit self-righteous as he vilifies Tristan before the lords, promising that "I shall wipe Cornwall clean of such a shame" (p. 77) and declaring Tristan to be "as one now dead, / Cast out of the clean honest midst of us" (p. 80). The point which pricks him is the same which had earlier disturbed Tristan (and still does): honor. He feels betrayed, dishonored, and wonders if all honor is dead (p. 79). Out of honor he takes Iseult back and banishes Tristan, a not unjust punishment considering the circumstances. That Mark's only real sin is that of ignorance the conclusion of the play amply demonstrates. He follows Iseult to Brittany intent on vengeance but quickly forgives their love upon learning the truth and promises to bury them in royal state (pp. 108-09). Overall, Symons portrays Mark as a very human but sympathetic character.

So, too, is Iseult of Brittany. Symons' affection for her is demonstrated not only in Tristan but also in a very short one-act play entitled "Iseult of Brittany," published in 1920.⁸⁷ In Tristan she appears only in the first and last acts; the action of "Iseult of Brittany" occurs between her two appearances in Tristan, after she has returned to Brittany and before Tristan, banished, goes to Brittany and marries her. Domestic, docile, easily intimidated, she seems, in Act I of Tristan, a mere child, weaving "A knight in armour, dying" (p. 7), which foreshadows

the conclusion in which she presides over Tristan's death. Her attempted defense of Tristan against her cousin Iseult and Meriadoc (pp. 20-21) springs largely from kindness, not love, though her anxiety over his fate suggests an unusual depth of feeling. In "Iseult of Brittany," she can find no peace for thinking of Tristan; she is, in short, in love with him. She knows that he is in Cornwall serving Mark and Queen Iseult but knows nothing of his love for her cousin (p. 82). Subconsciously, however, she perceives the possibility of her cousin's love for Tristan, for when Ygrain tells her that Queen Iseult could be as cruel "As a noble beast; / Not crafty, not for less than hate or death" (p. 78), she knots the thread she is embroidering with and stops her work immediately. Her father, the Duke of Jovelin, calms her and persuades her to be patient because patience will win in love: "There is a power, I think, in patient love, / Love draws its own unto itself, although / The whole strewn world, violently opposed, / Lie like a chasm between" (p. 83). Indeed, patience pays off. In Act IV of Tristan, though she has won him, she knows nevertheless that he has never really loved her (p. 91) and now discovers why--his love for Queen Iseult. The further discovery that Tristan awaits the Queen's coming sends her into fits of jealous fury so that she declares: "This man is mine, I hold him: better dead / And mine, than hers and living" (p. 90). But she is horror-struck by her own words: "What have I said? / It is this deadly woman whom I hate / That comes to bring him death. He shall not die" (p. 90). Agitated as she is, she recognizes that she should

not hate Tristan for the sake of her cousin, that the only valid object of hatred is the Queen. Hers is the experience not of the joy but of the agony of love: "O / The bitterness of love, the hate of love, / So kind in the beginning and so sharp / A sickle when the seed has come to ear!" (p. 90). When she learns from Tristan the secret of the sails, her trauma simply deepens, for now she knows the strength of her position: "Now, now, / I am to do with this man what I will / For the first time. I hold him in both hands / Now" (p. 98). Deeply troubled in spirit, she is not merely bent on evil or destruction; instead, she wages an internal battle, wondering what she will do at the critical moment when the sail appears. Symons renders her dilemma in what may well be the most poignant line in the play: "How can I see that sail and see it white?" (p. 98). When the sail appears, she vacillates for some moments, not wanting to lie but stung by the thought of losing Tristan to her cousin. Her eventual lie and Tristan's death distract her even further, leading her into hysteria; her rapid, staccato actions of retracting the lie, trying to awaken Tristan, taking his hand, claiming credit for killing him, and questioning where she shall go (pp. 104-06) suggest the possibility of madness and leave the audience feeling pity for her rather than disgust at her lie. In effect, she steals the spotlight from the following scene of the lovers' union in death, a union which relieves some audience tension but which seems rather anti-climactic after the wrenching experience Iseult of Brittany suffers.

These three elements--family hostilities, the forceful

character of Iseult as opposed to the passiveness of Tristan, and the sympathetic portrayals of the major characters--go far toward defining the major idea of Tristan as the division and conflict which are perhaps as indigenous to love as are unity and concord. The discordant qualities of the first two elements are readily apparent in external disagreements or, in the case of Tristan and Iseult, an inability to unite their desires in the face of opposition and internal loyalties; the conflict demonstrated in the portrayals of the characters, particularly Mark and Iseult of Brittany, takes the form of internal dissension, which renders them as tormented, struggling beings. Of the major characters, only Iseult of Ireland experiences no real inner battles; she wavers briefly after drinking the potion but, consistent with her general character, quickly reconciles herself to love and never looks back. Symons organizes these various conflicts in love around one controlling theme, that of war and peace. The battle ranges on two fronts, outer and inner, and peace eludes all the combatants except in death or madness or discovery of the truth.

Symons is on sure footing in viewing the love story as a contest of wills and personalities and emotions. First of all, it will be recalled that the event which triggers the story is a violent one, the slaying of Morolt. This international strife results first in Tristan's meeting of Iseult and then in a desire for peace by the marriage of Mark and Iseult. This does not conciliate everyone in the two kingdoms, for Meriadoc still seeks vengeance on Tristan, but the international struggle shifts to

private battles. Iseult, convinced that Cornwall will be her prison, charges Tristan with having stolen her peace (p. 47); her earlier prophecy that only death can bring peace (p. 39) proves ironically true, for after she and Tristan drink from the cup of love, no peace is possible on earth; enemies beforehand, they now have to struggle with their consciences and against Mark and society to obtain their few delights in love. Even when they are alone, Tristan particularly must wrestle with his impulses toward honor and loyalty to Mark (pp. 72-73). After Tristan's banishment, Meriadoc tracks him down and, in a battle not seen but vital to the play, inflicts the poisonous wound and receives himself a fatal blow. On another and later front, the two Iseults, though separated by seas, vie with each other for Tristan's love, even as he is dying, with fatal consequences for the lovers and virtual derangement for Iseult of Brittany. Ironically enough, Iseult of Brittany, unable to find peace without love, had believed that she could find it in love: "But I would build up the live air with peace / About a quiet nesting-place for love" ("Iseult of Brittany," p. 76). The final conflict, Mark's desire for vengeance, quickly resolves itself when he finds the lovers dead and discovers the truth that they loved "Not well or ill, but of necessity" (p. 109).

Most of the foregoing battles are fought on an external level, but the most excruciating ones, already delineated, are internal. To repeat briefly, Tristan struggles with the concept of honor, Mark wrestles with self-doubt and honor as well, and Iseult of Brittany wages a deadly battle with jealousy.

Tristan introduces the theme of love into the play by alluding to Helen, whose beauty also caused violence and wars. Princess Iseult asks Tristan if love is so cruel as to ravage the earth (as he says of Helen's case), and her mother responds: "My daughter, / Love is more cruel than a savage beast; / Therefore fear love" (p. 18). When Tristan lies dying, he tells Iseult that he once composed a "song of Iseult, Tristan's life and death," which he made "with the sorrow of the world / And with the sorrow in the hearts of men" (p. 93). His song of love, then, is a sad song. In the short play "Iseult of Brittany," Imogen sings his song, which records how love cast "His sharp and bitter dart . . . within my side" and how "she whom I love is she / Who is through love my foe" (p. 79). While Tristan's life testifies to the bitterness and conflict of love, both Iseults also discover its sting and cruelty; Iseult of Ireland, after drinking the potion, asks, "O what is love, and why is love so bitter / After the blinding sweetness of a moment?" (p. 51), and Iseult of Brittany, in jealous agony, remarks: "O / The bitterness of love, the hate of love, / So kind in the beginning and so sharp / A sickle when the seed has come to ear!" (p. 90). Mark is equally affected by the progress of love; though not so much a lover himself, he witnesses the disintegration of his world through love as the one man he has trusted and the one woman he has loved (p. 67) betray, unwillingly, that trust and love.

No one will deny the basic beauty of the legend as presented by Wagner, Swinburne, and Symonds; but where Wagner emphasizes

the desire of the lovers to merge their identities and Swinburne stresses the joy of their love in opposition to the hatred of Iseult of Brittany, Symons points up both the beauty and anguish not of achieved love so much as desired love. Indeed the one scene where love may be fulfilled, the liebesnacht of Act III, is wracked by Tristan's turmoil and indecision. The bareness and simplicity of Symons' style, though vastly different from the florid, ornate quality of Swinburne's, has something of the same effect as Atalanta in Calydon in tending to mask the underlying conflicts and divisiveness of the characters. The play actually requires long pauses and "silences," which Symons apparently learned from Maeterlinck,⁸⁸ for the full effect of the various actions to register in the consciousness of the audience. For that reason the play is much better read than performed, the lines requiring little time to recite but the pauses becoming awkward on stage. One example will illustrate. The time between Mark's final desire for vengeance and his forgiveness in the last scene requires no more than a minute on stage, but the change is so sudden, so abrupt, that without extended, awkward pauses it is unconvincing; either way, with or without the pauses, the play presents a major problem in pacing. The point to be made here is simply this: Symons' style of short, simple lines and speeches and his dramatic technique requiring pauses for full apprehension work against each other, with the result, for a stage performance at least, that much of the inner turmoil and agony receives little emphasis in the unfolding of external actions and conflicts which may

themselves be unconvincing. The wrenching, tearing, searing quality of love which Symons stresses in images of blood, wounding, and self-division requires a fundamentally different technique, one which perhaps makes use of an occasional soliloquy (of which there is only one, by Iseult of Brittany, in the last act); and the style, beautiful in its spareness, could use a bit of Swinburne's expansiveness, particularly in moments of profound anguish.

Symons' verse drama, Tristan, is not, in short, an unqualified success. Insofar as drama itself tends toward objectivity, it grants him an impersonality which the symbolists prized even in their intense subjectivity. Thouless says of Symons in Tristan: "His emotional conflicts are stilled, his personality dimmed, so that the emotion of love and the experience of tragic events may receive their form as poetic symbols."⁸⁹ But though he gains impersonality through an objective genre, it appears that his emotional conflicts are not entirely stilled, that the divisions in the play perhaps reflect the divisions in his own temperament. Throughout his biography of Symons, Lhombreaud delineates those divisions: the struggle between the visible, material world which Symons loved and the invisible, spiritual world which he sought to apprehend in his poetry; the pull between the aesthetic, to which he was naturally attracted, and the Nonconformist, moralistic, by which he was always haunted from his upbringing; the desire to perceive the truth in a self-contained world of art versus the need to engage in activities of the practical,

social world. Some of these divisions he sought to suppress rather than reconcile, especially the aesthetic-religious one, with one probable result being his mental breakdown in 1908.

It is possible, finally, to demonstrate the division of Tristan through the values generally associated with the imagery of sea and land. Symons follows most versions of the legend in associating the sea with passionate love, the most conclusive evidence of that coming when Iseult of Ireland acknowledges: "we are gone / A great way out into an unknown sea" (p. 52). Her statement follows the drinking scene in which the sea is enveloped in the light of awakening love (p. 49), bringing together a complex of images--light, sea, love--all reflecting and reinforcing each other. More than passion, however, the sea symbolizes fate, especially for Tristan. As pointed out earlier, the sea seems to shape his destiny. He follows it to Iseult, and it becomes the background for the rest of his life, not just for the voyage back to Cornwall; again it serves as background even in the garden scene of Act III; and its function as vehicle of fate in the last act is obvious. Given the passionate outburst of Act II, the subdued passion of Act III, and the outcome of the play, it is clear that Symons intended to sympathize with the lovers, to stress the rapture of erotic, passionate love, fated though it be. But his sensitive portrayal of Mark and Iseult of Brittany, even of Tristan's desire to remain loyal to Mark, means that he is also attracted to the values associated with land and society--duty, loyalty, stability, domestic love, morality. Put in terms of the play, there is an

honor in love and an honor in social and legal ties which often clash. Symons does not effectively resolve this conflict in morality but seems rather to take both sides. He does not excuse Mark's harshness or Iseult of Brittany's lie, but the sense of wounded pride and honor in Mark's case and desperation in Iseult of Brittany's softens considerably any judgment that the action might otherwise render on them and weakens, in addition, the possibility of complete sympathy for the lovers. It is impossible to say that Symons, like Arnold and Tennyson, sides ultimately with morality and domestic love in Tristan, merely that he recognizes and develops their attraction and power; by the same token, he does not give passionate love such ardent assent as Swinburne. Where Munro says Tristan and Iseult dramatizes, consciously or unconsciously, Symons' alienation and isolation,⁹⁰ I would say, instead, that it reflects a very basic division in his temperament, a division, in terms of the play, between a desire for and a deep-seated suspicion of passionate love; this division explains, I think, why Tristan fails to become what Symons wished the perfect work of art to be, a symbol whose meaning is open only to intuition, not analysis. And that division, in turn, reflects a critical division in the Victorian temperament at large between the need to worship woman in a cult of married love and the desire to throw off those social restraints which forbade passionate love--a division which the Victorian versions of Tristan ably dramatize.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

¹The Swinburne Letters, ed. Cecil Y. Lang, II (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 51.

²Frederick P. W. McDowell, "Aestheticism," Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 6-7.

³"Charles Baudelaire," The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, Bonchurch Edition, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise, XIII (London: William Heinemann, 1926), 417. Further references to this edition are cited in the text.

⁴Exactly when Symons wrote the play is uncertain. But Roger Lhombreaud in Arthur Symons: A Critical Biography (Philadelphia: Dufour, 1964), p. 203, says that he completed it in 1903.

⁵Symbolist Movement (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1919), pp. 6, 8, 9.

⁶See, for instance, Robert Raphael, Richard Wagner (New York: Twayne, 1969), p. 65; Ernest Newman, The Wagner Operas (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 204; Morse Peckham, Beyond the Tragic Vision (New York: George Braziller, 1962), p. 256.

⁷Arthurian Romance and Modern Poetry and Music (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), p. 32.

⁸Richard Wagner, Tristan und Isolde, London recording A 4506, cond. George Solti, n. p., 1960.

⁹Love in the Western World, pp. 228, 231.

¹⁰Elliott Zuckerman, The First Hundred Years of Wagner's Tristan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 24.

¹¹William Mann, "Introduction," Tristan und Isolde, trans. William Mann (London: The Friends of Covent Garden, Royal Opera House, 1968), p. 6.

¹²Peckham, pp. 242-57; Raphael, pp. 61-65.

¹³Peckham, pp. 256-57.

¹⁴All references to the text of the opera come from the Mann translation, above, note 11.

¹⁵Raphael, p. 65.

¹⁶Peckham, p. 256.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 259-60.

¹⁸(New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 178-82.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 180-83.

²⁰The Wagner Operas, p. 197.

²¹Ibid., p. 231; see also pp. 203, 204, 232, 247.

²²Zuckerman, p. 12.

²³Ibid., p. 7.

²⁴Raphael, pp. 62, 64.

²⁵Love in the Western World, p. 218.

²⁶Letters, III, 232.

²⁷Philip Henderson, Swinburne: Portrait of a Poet (New York: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 27, 29.

²⁸Jean Overton Fuller, Swinburne: A Critical Biography (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), p. 38.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 40-41.

³⁰Peckham, Beyond the Tragic Vision, pp. 316, 320-21. Peckham's major point, however, in his discussion of Atalanta is that the drama is an attack upon the family.

³¹Letters, II, 72-73.

³²Samuel C. Chew, Swinburne (1929; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1966), p. 166.

³³See Letters, II, 259; III, 203, 206; IV, 239, 240, 246, 260, 265, 268.

³⁴The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne (London: Macmillan, 1917), p. 261.

³⁵Letters, IV, 268.

³⁶Swinburne's Literary Career and Fame (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1933), pp. 196-97.

³⁷"Tristram of Lyonesse and Other Poems," The Critic, 2 (1882), 210.

³⁸"Swinburne's New Poems," The Literary World, Sept. 9, 1882, pp. 293-94.

³⁹"The Story of Tristram and Isolt in English Poetry," Pt. 1, Narrative Versions, The Criterion, 1 (1922), 35-36.

⁴⁰Gosse, pp. 262-63; Chew, p. 170; T. Earle Welby, A Study of Swinburne (1926; rpt. Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat, 1968), pp. 238-39.

⁴¹Henderson, p. 204.

⁴²"Dedicatory Epistle," in Swinburne Replies, ed. Clyde Kenneth Hyder (Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1966), p. 99.

⁴³Margaret J. C. Reid, The Arthurian Legend: Comparison of Treatment in Modern and Mediaeval Literature (1938; rpt. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), pp. 211, 213.

⁴⁴Letters, II, 51.

⁴⁵"Swinburne and Wagner," Victorian Poetry, 9 (1971), 172-76.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 179-83.

⁴⁷John R. Reed, "Swinburne's Tristram of Lyonesse: The Poet-Lover's Song of Love," Victorian Poetry, 4 (1966), 100. See also Ian Fletcher, Swinburne, Writers and their Work Series (London: Longman, 1973), p. 45.

⁴⁸Sypher, pp. 178-79.

⁴⁹Reed, pp. 99-120; Kerry McSweeney, "The Structure of Swinburne's 'Tristram of Lyonesse,'" Queen's Quarterly, 75 (1968), 690-702.

⁵⁰Chew, p. 178.

⁵¹John D. Rosenberg, "Swinburne," Victorian Studies, 11 (1967), 135.

⁵²John A. Cassidy, Algernon C. Swinburne (New York: Twayne, 1964), p. 158.

- ⁵³McSweeney, pp. 690, 693, 697, 702.
- ⁵⁴Reed, pp. 115-17.
- ⁵⁵Rosenberg, pp. 136-37.
- ⁵⁶Morse Peckham, "Introduction," Poems and Ballads; Atalanta in Calydon (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), p. xxx.
- ⁵⁷Rosenberg, p. 139.
- ⁵⁸Peckham, "Introduction," pp. xxix-xxx.
- ⁵⁹Peckham, Beyond the Tragic Vision, p. 316.
- ⁶⁰Peckham, "Introduction," p. xxxi.
- ⁶¹Cassidy, p. 155.
- ⁶²Rosenberg, p. 137.
- ⁶³Peckham, Beyond the Tragic Vision, p. 322.
- ⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 307-13.
- ⁶⁵Chew, pp. 175-76.
- ⁶⁶Chew, pp. 3-5; Peckham, Beyond the Tragic Vision, p. 322.
- ⁶⁷Beyond the Tragic Vision, p. 322.
- ⁶⁸Rosenberg, p. 137.
- ⁶⁹Fuller, p. 253.
- ⁷⁰Letters, IV, 260, 268, 272, 275.
- ⁷¹Peckham, "Introduction," p. xxxi.
- ⁷²McSweeney, p. 697.
- ⁷³Peckham, Beyond the Tragic Vision, p. 315.
- ⁷⁴The Collected Works of Arthur Symons (1924; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1973), I, 4. This incomplete edition of Symons' works is hereafter cited in the text for Symons' short poetry only.
- ⁷⁵Plays, Acting and Music: A Book of Theory (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1909), pp. 318, 322.

⁷⁶Lhombreaud, Arthur Symons, p. 203.

⁷⁷Derek Stanford, "Arthur Symons and Modern Poetics," The Southern Review, New Series, 2 (1966), 349, 351.

⁷⁸John M. Munro, Arthur Symons (New York: Twayne, 1969), pp. 36, 76.

⁷⁹"Arthur Symons," in Modern Poetic Drama (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1934), pp. 130-33.

⁸⁰Tristan and Iseult: A Play in Four Acts (London: William Heinemann, 1917), pp. 49-50. Hereafter cited in the text.

⁸¹Lhombreaud, p. 209.

⁸²Ibid., p. 13.

⁸³Zuckerman, First Hundred Years of Tristan, pp. 99-115.

⁸⁴"Tristan and Iseult," The New York Times Book Review, 22 (1917), 559, 561; other reviews are found in The Times Literary Supplement, Dec. 20, 1917, p. 635; and Eugene Mason, The Bookman, 54 (April 1918), 16.

⁸⁵See Munro, p. 131; Lhombreaud, pp. 209-10; T. Earle Welby, Arthur Symons: A Critical Study (London: A. M. Philpot, 1925), p. 76; Thouless, pp. 130-33; Gwendolyn Timmons Ziemann, "Fate, Chance and Free Will in Nineteenth Century Tristan and Iseult Legends," Diss. Arizona State University, 1971.

⁸⁶A. R. Cunningham, "The 'New Woman Fiction' of the 1890's," Victorian Studies, 17 (1973), 177-80.

⁸⁷Cesare Borgia, Iseult of Brittany, The Toy Cart (New York: Brentano's, 1920), pp. 75-84. Hereafter cited in the text.

⁸⁸Symbolist Movement, p. 84; Thouless, pp. 129, 131.

⁸⁹Thouless, pp. 134-35.

⁹⁰Arthur Symons, p. 128.

CHAPTER IV

THE NATURALISTIC VIEW: HARDY

Shortly after publication of The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall in late 1923, Lloyd Morris, a reviewer, remarked: "It was almost inevitable that Thomas Hardy should finally turn to the legend of Tristram and Iseult."¹ Considering the basic theme of the legend, fated love, and Hardy's preoccupation with that theme, Morris's remark is perfectly justified. What is surprising is that Hardy did not turn to the legend sooner. All available evidence suggests that he had long been interested in the legend but that the close association in his mind between the story and certain events in his life prevented any active creative endeavor on his own version of Tristan.

The region of Cornwall figures prominently in both his life and art. On a trip to St. Juliot Rectory, Cornwall, in 1870, Hardy met Emma Lavinia Gifford, whom he married in 1874. During the courtship he visited Tintagel at least three times² and also composed the novel A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873), which is set in Cornwall. The setting, he says in the Preface, is a "region of dream and mystery." He later celebrated the glow of this four-year period, probably the happiest time of his life, with one of his best-known lyrics, "When I Set Out for Lyonesse" (1914), subsequently adding "(1870)" to the title.³

The magic and glow of these years soon faded, however, after

his marriage to Emma. Their division, exacerbated by Emma's class consciousness and their religious disagreements, widened into an unbridgeable gap,⁴ though they continued to live together until Emma's death in 1912. As his "Poems of 1912-13" in Satires of Circumstance (1914) testify, Hardy now felt regret over their estrangement and Emma's death, a feeling which enabled him to cast a halo over his Cornish romance of the early 1870's. Only after his second marriage to Florence Emily Dugdale did he return in September 1916 to Cornwall and Tintagel (Later Years, p. 172). A letter to Sir Sydney Cockerell of September 20, 1916, indicates that he began The Queen of Cornwall after that visit but that he was unable to complete it: "Alas, I fear your hopes of a poem on Iseult--the English, or British Helen--will be disappointed. I visited the place 44 years ago with an Iseult of my own, and of course she was mixed in the vision of the other."⁵ When the play was finally completed in 1923, he wrote to Alfred Noyes that it had been "53 years in contemplation," since, that is, the year he met Emma.⁶

If, as the letter states, he had contemplated the play for fifty-three years, it is likely that his own experience in love along the Cornish coast and afterward in marriage rendered the story of fated love too painful to execute in a version of his own. True, he had treated the theme--or variations of it--in most of his novels from A Pair of Blue Eyes through Jude the Obscure (1895), but the setting of Tintagel and the power of the legend in association with his own memories of that locale must

have made this story quite personal, rather different from his fictionalized tales of Wessex. A Pair of Blue Eyes, to be sure, is set in Cornwall and treats, among other things, the tragic love of a poor young architect, Steven Smith, and Elfride Swancourt, the daughter of the Reverend Christopher Swancourt, who refuses to accept Steven, a commoner, as his son-in-law; both the setting and the problem of class consciousness seem almost autobiographical. But it must be remembered that Hardy completed the novel in 1873, while still experiencing the glow of romantic love; he knew nothing yet of the pain of conjugal love.

Hardy's own experience, then, taught him the difficulties involved in love. Before marriage, love was glorious; after Emma's death, it was a glory that might have been. But the reality of married love was little short of disastrous. This is perhaps why John R. Dove remarks of love in Hardy's poetry: "It is either located in time past as a transfiguring but ephemeral experience that can never be recaptured but only lamented as an irretrievable loss, or it is placed on a distant horizon in an improbable future."⁷ Indeed, Hardy's love poetry tells a more personal story than his novels. Much of it was apparently composed during his first marriage but not published until after Emma's death; yet many of those poems written after her death obviously refer to his Cornish romance or to his problems in marriage. "At Castle Boterel," for example, refers, according to Weber,⁸ to the period of romance. The poem recalls a climb they took together and the transfiguring effect of love:

What we did as we climbed, and what we talked of
 Matters not much, nor to what it led,--
 Something that life will not be balked of
 Without rude reason till hope is dead,
 And feeling fled.

It filled but a minute. But was there ever
 A time of such quality, since or before,
 In that hill's story? To one mind never,
 Though it has been climbed, foot-swift, foot-sore,
 By thousands more.⁹

"The Division," written sometime in the 1890's, records the distance, apparently, between man and wife; separated at the moment by a "hundred miles," they are even farther removed in mind and spirit:

But that thwart thing betwixt us twain,
 Which nothing cleaves or clears,
 Is more than distance, Dear, or rain,
 And longer than the years! (CP, p. 205)

Such poems as "Rain on a Grave," "Lament," "The Curtains Now are Drawn," and "The Voice," all written in the years 1912-13, express Hardy's regret over the loss of Emma and, by implication, the love that might have been.

It is doubtful, however, that Hardy's attitude toward love was based solely on his personal experience. From his study of Darwin he came to view man as a victim of nature, of both those inner impulses and drives which prompt man to act and of those outer forces, such as environment and society, which he must struggle against for survival. What governs man's life, if anything, is chance, circumstance, accident ("Hap"), which Hardy symbolizes in The Dynasts as the Immanent Will, an unconscious, amoral force immanent in man yet transcendent in the cosmos at

large. Toward the species and the individual the Will is utterly indifferent, yet ironically it works through man's most basic urges and impulses to achieve its most effective power. Hardy's terminology notwithstanding, a simpler, and perhaps better, term for this force is fate. In such a universe love is ironic. It holds out the promise of order and personal fulfillment and allows man to dream of happiness. But nearly always fate intervenes to frustrate and crush those promises and dreams. Other love lyrics having nothing to do with Emma bear this out, as do the novels. "Singing Lovers," for instance, treats the idea of betrayal in love. In "Honeymoon Time at an Inn," a newly wed couple are burdened by a feeling of sadness, and the wife interprets the breaking of an "old-time pier-glass" as meaning "long years of sorrow" for them; behind the wainscot the Spirits Ironie laugh that their fate is typical of all lovers' fate: "Oh, in brief they will fade till old, / And their loves grow numbed ere death, by the cark of care" (CP, pp. 484-85). Some of the most powerful and passionate characters of his novels, including Eustacia Vye, Tess Durbeyfield, and Jude Fawley, are subject to a similar fate; in each case, their inner motives and the world around them conspire to rob them of promised joy. Even when love does eventually succeed, as in the case of Bathsheba Everdene and Gabriel Oak or Diggory Venn and Thomasin Yeobright, circumstances ordinarily conspire against its natural course until most of the passion is spent, allowing the lovers to settle into a rather passionless if comfortable domesticity; and yet these characters are generally

the exception in Hardy's works. As a rule, love, either passionate or domestic, is doomed in Hardy. Passionate love is fatal; and domestic love, circumscribed by routine and "the cark of care," is unsatisfying, devolving into frustration and failure.

When Hardy finally completed The Queen of Cornwall at age eighty-three, then, his basic attitudes toward love had long been formed through many years of experience and by his philosophical bias. And these attitudes were bound to color his treatment of the legend, whatever approach he took. In fact, he sought to reconcile the romantic ending of Thomas with the brutal one of Malory and chose as his vehicle the drama, a genre he had but little practiced. As Marguerite Roberts points out, he had always been interested in the theater and had written several minor plays, most of which were adaptations of his short stories, such as The Three Wayfarers, originally "The Three Strangers." He had, besides, written The Dynasts, an epic-drama not intended for the stage, though he selected certain scenes for dramatic presentation during World War I to help the Red Cross. But The Queen of Cornwall is unique among his plays; of the plays that he conceived and wrote originally for the theater, it is the only one that he considered worthy of publication.¹⁰

In selecting drama for his Tristram, Hardy departed radically from the dramatic versions of Wagner and Symons, both of which he may well have known. He chose a form approximating Greek tragedy which allowed him to tell the story within the classical unities of time and place. The action occurs at Tintagel after the

Queen's visit to Brittany, where she had gone to heal Tristram. Iseult the Whitehanded had lied about the sails, and the Queen had fainted and returned to Tintagel. The play begins with her return and the simultaneous return of Mark from his hunting expedition. In rapid succession, Tristram, having recovered, follows the Queen to Tintagel, and Iseult the Whitehanded follows him. Thus Hardy sets the scene for the final confrontation between the four major characters. Events move quickly to their end: Tristram and Iseult the Whitehanded quarrel; the Queen overwhelms Tristram's wife in their confrontation; Tristram sings sadly of love to the Queen; Mark stabs Tristram; the Queen stabs Mark and then, with Tristram's dog Houdain, leaps into the sea. Iseult the Whitehanded returns to Brittany. The entire action lasts little more than an hour. To supply the necessary background information, Hardy employs a chorus of sorts, "Shades of Dead Old Cornish Men" and "Shades of Dead Old Cornish Women"; these Chanters, or Ghosts, also comment on the present action. Further, as Hardy says in a letter to Harold Child, the "change of persons on the stage is called a change of scene, there being no change of background" (Later Years, p. 235).

But The Queen of Cornwall is not merely an imitation of Greek tragedy. It is also apparently intended as a folk-play for mummers. According to Hardy's directions, "The costumes of the players are the conventional ones of bright linen fabrics, trimmed with ribbon, as in the old mumming shows."¹ The wizard Merlin, "a phantasmal figure with a white wand" (p. 533), suggests the

Presenter of the old Mummers' Plays; appearing in a "blue light," he, like the Presenter, introduces the play in a Prologue.¹² In Hardy's play, he also speaks the Epilogue. The mere suggestion of mumming evokes a sense of England's past, a device by which Hardy evidently meant to set his Tristram apart from the earlier Victorian versions: "I have tried to avoid turning the rude personages of, say, the fifth century into respectable Victorians, as was done by Tennyson, Swinburne, Arnold, etc. On the other hand it would have been impossible to present them as they really were, with their barbaric manners and surroundings" (Later Years, pp. 235-36). And this much the mumming achieves: it serves, in the "Recitative" monologue of the ghostly Chanters, to "undermine passion" and to cast a macabre dream-like quality over the play.¹³

Whether or not this atmosphere of ghastly dream is the proper one for a story of passionate love--even undermined passion--is another matter. Reminding an audience at the outset that the characters have been dead "these thousand years" (p. 533) and reinforcing that impression through the continuous presence of ghostly Chanters poses a real problem for any imaginative identification with the actors. The basic weakness seems to be that Hardy imposes the grim atmosphere upon the action instead of allowing it to grow out of events themselves--a weakness, incidentally, often charged against his novels. Such features as blue lights and an atmosphere of dreams may be extremely effective in expressionistic drama, for example, but they

must develop from within, not without, the action. To other ears, however, the odd combination of Greek tragedy and Mummers' play strikes the most jarring note of the play. To put it bluntly, the two forms do not mix easily. And the result is that The Queen of Cornwall achieves neither the stateliness and dignity of Greek tragedy nor the simplicity and earthiness of the Mummers' play; instead, it is a peculiar mixture of low cunning and intense confrontation, underscored by the inexorable hand of circumstance and fate.

Whatever Hardy intended, the reviewers were divided in their responses to the play. Mark Van Doren praised it for its "beauty and intensity";¹⁴ Martin Armstrong called it a "masterpiece of construction";¹⁵ and Ernest Brennecke, Jr., while noting the difficulties in its first performance at Dorchester, applauded its simplicity: "All is stark and simple. The construction is closed, locked, and riveted."¹⁶ On the other hand, Samuel C. Chew found the attempt to harmonize the two versions of Tristan unconvincing and wondered if these scenes were "the last fruits off an old tree" or merely "dry sticks";¹⁷ J. Veldkamp considered Hardy's realistic treatment of a romantic subject to be a serious weakness of the play and a violation of the legend.¹⁸ Other reviewers were perhaps more sober in their assessments, praising Hardy's attempt at drama but noting some weaknesses as well, especially in style and form. Ivor Brown and Lascelles Abercrombie both pointed to the harsh style, full of archaic words and prosaic diction, as detracting from the play.¹⁹ And in some particularly perceptive comments, Archibald Henderson considered the play's

"fundamental weakness" to be Hardy's technique of having the Chanters narrate too "many links of the story which are indispensable to the auditor's understanding of the motives of the characters"; this creates the effect of "too great compression of plot, too close compression." He further regarded the play as far too complex for mummers and the Greek model as "not wholly happy," for the Greek audience always knew the story beforehand.²⁰ The Times Literary Supplement reviewer singled out the idea of mumming for his sharpest remarks: ". . . the mummers' play, for all its charm of memory, is now so far degraded . . . that it is not worthy of serving even as handmaid to poetic tragedy. . . . For another thing, the mummers' play is wholly popular in origin and character: and the simplicity of The Queen of Cornwall is not the simplicity of the folkmind."²¹

Despite the problems of and the mixed reactions to the play, The Queen of Cornwall is nevertheless important in the evolution of Victorian attitudes toward love. Though it may be considered modern in its naturalistic treatment of love, the play actually reflects attitudes toward love which began to take shape even before the deaths of those occasional spokesmen for the high Victorian cult of love, Arnold and Tennyson. But it is safe to say that the play, like Hardy himself, is transitional, linking Victorian and modern attitudes toward romantic and domestic love. Hardy's primary attitude toward love takes the form of paradox: passionate love is fatal because it promises what it cannot fulfill; domestic love fails to satisfy man's desire for passion.

As a consequence, man is doomed in love. This can best be shown by a consideration of fate and its manner of dramatic operation in the play.

As envisioned and illustrated by Hardy, The Queen of Cornwall first presents to the viewer (or reader) "the interior of the Great Hall at Tintagel" at the back of which an archway opens onto the ramparts and discloses the Atlantic. Though the action progresses, the scene never changes so that the auditor comes more and more to realize that that one expanse of sea largely sets the mood of the play. It broods over the action, accumulating suggestions of fate and doom. In the beginning Merlin recounts the voyage on which Tristram and Iseult quaffed the love potion, and the Chanters quickly follow with an account of Iseult's voyage to Brittany to be with Tristram. When Iseult enters, fresh from the journey, she reveals to Brangwain the reason for her going--Tristram's illness--and the reason for her quick and perilous return--the news that Tristram was dead, at which she fainted and therefore never left the ship. On the return voyage, they ran into a "blinding gale," and "the seas sloped like houseroofs all the way," with the result that they had to take port for a day until the storm subsided (p. 543). On these same seas, however, Tristram and Iseult the Whitehanded have been sailing. "Stung by circumstance" (p. 548), Tristram has quickly recovered from his fever upon learning of his wife's lie. He arrives at Tintagel only moments after the Queen and only a few moments before his wife, who pursues him hotly. All the while, the sea serves as

background, both for the voyages and for the visual scene itself. And the mere mention of storm suggests the experience each character is undergoing: the storm, the upheaval, of love. That storm rages in the quarrel of Tristram and Iseult the Whitehanded, reaches its climax in the momentary confrontation of the two Iseults, and completely subsides in the melancholy love scene between Tristram and Queen Iseult. But only for a moment. As Mark approaches with his dagger, the "scene darkens"; when he stabs Tristram, the sea is "heard without"; and when Queen Iseult stabs Mark, "the sea and the sky darken yet more, and the wind rises, distant thunder murmuring" (pp. 563, 564, 565). Shortly afterward, Iseult leaps into the sea, into blind, "unseeing" nature. The sea thus becomes the most visible symbol of fate in the play, suggesting the helplessness of man caught up in the storms of love.

But external nature, while emphasizing the insignificance of man, merely confirms his doom; it does not cause that doom. The same force, fate, which operates throughout nature operates also in man. In one sense it is transcendent, above and beyond man and nature, subjecting all phenomena to its inexorable, unconscious will. In The Queen of Cornwall the love-potion functions as symbol of this transcendent power. Tristram makes this clear in his second speech to Queen Iseult; the "love-drink," he says, was "ministered /to us/ by hand unseen!" (p. 548). Working through the potion, this power delivers the lovers into "Love's unrest" and "bonds" they "did not forecast, did not see!" (p. 563). But

in another and more forceful sense, fate is immanent in all phenomena. In man, it operates through drives and impulses that are utterly selfish. Hardy thus approximates the Greek concept of fate which, though higher than man, works through man's character to destroy him. Hardy's characters may not be as noble as those of Greek tragedy, but they achieve dignity insofar as they struggle against those forces, outer and inner, which victimize and destroy them.

One character in The Queen of Cornwall lacks dignity and integrity altogether: King Mark. Though he is not bound in such chains as Iseult and Tristram, his life too has been compromised by the love potion, and he knows it. In Hardy's play, unlike any other version of the legend, he has been informed of the potion long before the tragic denouement. But that knowledge in no way ennoble him, for rather than seeking to alleviate in any noble way the painful consequences of fated love, he determines instead to wreak vengeance on Tristram. Such brutality and baseness, however, have always been characteristic of Mark. The Chanters remark, for example, that his love for Tristram was always "slight," that in fact he camouflaged his real intent in sending Tristram to Ireland in the first place: "Mark sent him thither as to gain / Iseult, but, truly, to be slain!" (p. 545). His baseness extends even to animals; shortly after he enters the play, he kicks Tristram's dog Houdain for no reason at all except that the dog is Tristram's (p. 537). Until his final act of stabbing Tristram, he spends his time carousing and feasting,

satisfying his purely animal appetities. He is, in short, the real animal, "King Fox" (p. 548), waiting for the right moment to seize his victim. The potion serves as nothing more than an excuse for him to perform the act that he has always wished--the murder of his nephew. Fate thus operates through his meanness and bestiality to achieve its ends.

In her desire to possess, at whatever cost, that which is legally hers, Iseult the Whitehanded is also selfish. But she differs from Mark in several ways: she is apparently ignorant of the love potion, she struggles to some degree against her own selfish interests, and she is not motivated by hatred and the desire to destroy her rival in love. Nonetheless, fate works through her jealousy and selfishness to precipitate the action of the drama. When Tristram lay ill in Brittany, she overcame her jealousy long enough to send for Queen Iseult to "save him at all cost" (p. 542). Yet the sight of the Queen's white sail overpowered her better resolution, and in a fit of jealous love she lied first to Tristram that the sail was black and then to the Queen that Tristram was dead (p. 548). Fate dictates, however, that Tristram recover and sail for Tintagel. And his wife follows, seeking selfishly to possess a husband who does not love her. Her entrance into Tintagel occasions the identification of Tristram (p. 553), who had disguised himself as a harper for purposes of protection and gaining audience with the Queen. In the confrontation with Tristram which follows, she begs his forgiveness for pursuing him and pleads her case as a loyal, long-suffering wife:

Forgive me, do forgive, my lord, my husband!
 I love, have loved you so imperishably;
 Not with fleet flame at times, as some do use!
 Had I once been unfaithful, even perverse,
 I would have held some coldness fitly won;
 But I have ever met your wryest whim
 With ready-wrought acceptance, matched your moods,
 Clasped hands, touched lips, and smiled devotedly; . . .
 (pp. 554-55)

She never attacks Tristram but rather sings her own virtues as a faithful but wronged wife. On one hand, her rightfully defensive attitude enlists much sympathy, for she has been wronged without knowing why; on the other, her sanctimonious, whining tone undercuts any wholehearted approval of her protest. She implies that she had no choice either in the lies or in the pursuit, that love exerted a power stronger than her will to resist. And in a last desperate attempt to remain near Tristram, she declares that she will become the Queen's "bondwench" (p. 557). Such a voluntary abasement measures both the intensity of her love and her craving for possession. There can be no doubt that her primary motivation is selfish, that she is the victim of an inner urging which she does not fully comprehend. Yet she does not charge her wrongs to her rival but rather goes so far as to grant the validity, but not the right,²² of Queen Iseult's love for Tristram: "He was not hers . . . / Yet she did love him true, if wickedly!" (p. 567). From beginning to end she is in bondage to a love sanctioned by law but never reciprocated, and she struggles against it but feebly. Nevertheless, that very struggle in conjunction with her basic tolerance of others confers upon her a measure of dignity which sets her off sharply from Mark. Not until the end does she

realize that her situation has been hopeless all along, that fate determines all:

Then even had I not come
Across the southern water recklessly
This would have shaped the same--the very same.
(p. 568)

She rightly assumes no responsibility for the deaths of Tristram, Mark, and Queen Iseult; but she conveniently forgets that her own jealous lying precipitated this final ill-fated voyage of Tristram to Tintagel. According to Hardy, fate operates through all the characters, including her.

But those over whom fate exercises the largest control are Tristram and Queen Iseult. They must battle outer as well as inner forces. The love potion, as pointed out above, symbolizes external fate, causing them to sin "under sorcery unwittingly" (p. 564). In addition, they have to struggle against society, which condemns their love, to find relief from the torments of love. And they try mightily, though unsuccessfully, to circumvent the dictates of fate by adapting themselves to acceptable social behavior. Had Tristram chosen, he could have easily overpowered the cowardly, villainous Mark and claimed the Queen as his own; instead, he remains loyal, even to the point of rescuing Mark from his enemies, the Sessoines, and saving his fellow knights from certain destruction (pp. 564-65). Iseult, likewise, remains largely loyal to Mark, despite her misery. Occasionally, love overwhelms them and they meet by clandestine design, as in their month-long stay at Gard Castle (p. 534). Still, however, they wish to remain loyal to uncle and husband. After the rendezvous

at Gard Castle, Iseult, in a totally new twist to the legend, actually sends Tristram to Brittany, hoping he will find comfort in her namesake, for whom she feels "a kindness" (p. 559). Her generosity ironically proves her undoing, for Tristram wins Iseult the Whitehanded as recompense for saving King Howel's land and marries her, thinking that Mark had finally won the Queen's heart. His marriage merely complicates their situation, as Queen Iseult quickly perceives:

Yet, Tristram, would my husband were but all!
 Had you not wedded her my namesake, Oh,
 We could have steered around this other rock--
 Trust me we could! (p. 549)

Both actions, Iseult's sending Tristram to Brittany and his marriage to her namesake, may seem futile, even foolish, in light of the lovers' certain knowledge of their unquenchable love; yet those actions may be viewed as solid evidence of a desire to channel their love into socially acceptable forms.

But try as they may, they cannot circumvent fate. Iseult grows so restless and miserable with Mark that she sends for Tristram, stipulating that he may even bring his wife with him (p. 534). And when Mark leaves with his hunting party, she hastens to Brittany to heal her ailing lover. Tristram, angered on his recovery by his wife's deception, quickly follows the Queen to Tintagel. The point is this: Tristram and Iseult, finding much torment and frustration but few and fleeting joys in passionate love, which the potion doomed them to, attempt to sublimate their feelings in married love; but domestic love fails to satisfy their passion, their hunger for each other,

driving them back into each other's arms.

In a broad sense, fate operates to destroy them through their very nobility. That is why their final meeting is so somber. They know the futility of struggling against passionate love; they know the inadequacies of domestic love; and they know, subconsciously at least, that they are doomed. Yet they remain noble to the end. When the Damsel gives Tristram Mark's letter to Arthur threatening vengeance on Tristram, he refuses to read it and excuses Mark on the ground of being "drunk / When writing such!" (p. 562). Iseult, fearing for Tristram's life, forgets herself and urgently tells him, "save thyself, / And think no more of me!" (p. 562). But Tristram, despite the Queen's "forebodings," chooses to remain and sing to her in the ominous silence that has fallen over the castle. He remarks that he could "sing jeeringly / Of the King . . . the song Sir Dinadan / Made up about him," to which Iseult responds: "Nay love; sadness suits you best . . . / Sad, sad are we: we will not jeer at him" (p. 563). Tristram's final love song, then, sounds the keynote of their sadness and doom:

Yea, Love, true is it sadness suits me best!
 Sad, sad we are; sad, sad shall ever be.
 What shall deliver us from Love's unrest,
 And bonds we did not forecast, did not see!

If, Love, the night fall on us, dark of hope,
 Let us be true, whatever else may be;
 Let us be strong, and without waver cope
 With heavy dooms, dooms we could not foresee!
 (p. 563)

And doom strikes with sudden swiftness in a form they did not foresee: Mark drives his dagger through Tristram's back.

With that act, the sense of doom which has hung heavily over the last scenes finds decisive expression. At this point, however, it can be argued that Iseult, like Tess Durbeyfield, takes fate into her own hands. If her life was tormented before Mark's dastardly deed, it is now shattered, and she makes good on her word to Tristram, "But your death's mine, Love!" (p. 562), by first stabbing his murderer and then taking her own life. It is her glory and Hardy's contribution to the legend that she does not surrender passively to fate, which has mocked her previous struggles with herself and the world. Doomed she is, but she, not fate, performs the last acts of murder and suicide in a final tribute to passionate love. Her last lines express the depth of that love: "--I have lived! I have loved! O I have loved indeed: / Not Heaven itself could size my vast of love!" (p. 565). But it is Sir Andret, the villainous cohort of Mark, who understands best what her love has wrought through her death:

A Queen. 'Od's blood,
Her flaws in life get mended by her death,
And she and Tristram sport re-burnished flames!
(p. 567)

Thus Hardy suggests that the lovers transcend fate insofar as they live on in song and story. Fate has controlled their lives, but Iseult herself determines to join Tristram in death; and her action assures, for Sir Andret at least, that their fame will outlive their fate.

In a world governed by fate, such as Hardy's, Iseult's suicide cannot be considered altogether cowardly. Though her situation is somewhat different from theirs, it recalls that of

Euripides' Phaedra and Hardy's own Eustacia Vye. All three are hemmed in by fate--Iseult by passion and society, Phaedra by honor and personal happiness, Eustacia Vye by Egdon Heath and the doom it represents. All three are conquered by fate but remain somewhat heroic in their devastation; they may be conquered physically by the forces pressing in against them, but their spirits remain unconquered. Phaedra, like Iseult, commits suicide and for somewhat the same reason as Iseult--her guilty passion for Hippolytus. Eustacia, tormented by her desire to leave Egdon Heath and her attraction to Wildeve, drowns, but the reason for her death is ambiguous, suicide being a real possibility. Iseult, trapped in her passion for Tristram and in her loveless marriage to Mark, differs from Phaedra and Eustacia in striking out at one of the instruments of fate, her brutal husband, before taking her own life. After her daring act of killing Mark, there is no place left for Iseult to go. Life would merely rob her of spirit, as fate has robbed her of Tristram.

With the death of Tristram, Iseult is, figuratively speaking, already dead, as she realizes: "O living years, what sharp entrancements, tears, / Are yours--who are yet but Death with Tristram gone" (p. 565). Ever since she drank of the potion, fate has centered her life in Tristram; life without him would be purposeless. Her long struggles against fate to find a place of happiness having ended in utter failure, she has little choice except in the type of death: either a figurative death, which life will confer upon her, or a literal death, which will end

the nightmare of life. Her final struggle, then, is against herself; it is brief, melodramatic, decisive. Significantly, she makes no mention of transcending death; apparently regarding death as final, she speaks of her "last deed" as one that will "null myself, as if I had never been!" (p. 565). Iseult the Whitehanded, in a moment of bitterness, obviously agrees with the Queen's view: "Well, well; she's lost him, / Even as have I" (p. 568). Only Sir Andret sees the Queen's death romantically, enabling the lovers to "sport re-burnished fames" (p. 567).

The conclusion, then is actually more realistic than romantic, though Hardy apparently intended to combine the brutally realistic ending of Malory and Tennyson with the romantic one of Thomas, Wagner, and Swinburne. Brutality there is, in addition to Iseult's realistic assessment of her future and her unsentimental attitude toward death. But there is neither the transfiguration of Wagner nor the ecstasy of Swinburne. The romantic viewpoint finds expression only in an onlooker, himself a coward and villain. Hardy seems to suggest that the real romance of passionate love occurs more in the minds of others than in the lives of those possessed by it. For passionate love promises joy and ecstasy but delivers torment and agony in the form of obstacles (Mark and Iseult the Whitehanded) to the fulfillment of love. Paradoxically, those obstacles, by sharpening the lovers' desire, keep the passion alive, leading the lovers to further furtive meetings and further failures. Domestic love, the primary obstacle for Hardy, fails to satisfy the need for passion and

results in quarrelsomeness and discord. Neither type of love is very gratifying; however, the longing and insatiable desire which characterize passionate love make it especially appealing and romantic to many, like Sir Andret, who have not experienced its effects.

But if Hardy does not sing the raptures of passionate love, neither does he praise domestic love. Marriage in The Queen of Cornwall is fraught with difficulty. The love potion alone would make the marriages difficult enough, but such problems as the jealousy and possessiveness of Mark and Iseult the Whitehanded can scarcely be attributed to the charmed drink; these problems result, instead, from the characters' natural dispositions and from what they apparently feel to be a legal right bestowed upon them by the institution of marriage--the right to possess another human being against his wishes. Mark's actions, in the face of his knowledge of the potion, betray his possessiveness; the lies of Iseult the Whitehanded perform the same function, as does her judgment that Tristram "was not hers [Queen Iseult's]. . . / Yet she did love him true, if wickedly!" (p. 567). Marriage simply does not satisfy any of the characters. It makes Mark harsh and brusque, Iseult the Whitehanded jealous and self-righteous, and the lovers restless and miserable. In fact, The Queen of Cornwall may be seen, from one perspective, as a continuation of Hardy's criticism in Jude the Obscure of the rigid marriage laws which yoke together two people, often mis-matched, forever. The enforcement of those laws in ill-suited marriages, such as the

two of this play, inevitably breeds torment and agony.

In a larger sense, Tristram and Iseult suffer the same fate as Jude Fawley, the fate of frustration. Just as Jude finds real fulfillment with neither Sue nor Arabella, Tristram and Iseult experience frustration in both passionate and domestic love. When together, as for a brief moment in the play, they are tormented by thoughts of their marriages; when apart, they are tormented by thoughts of each other. They are, in short, doomed to love but to experience little, if any, satisfaction in that love. Fate, however it operates in Hardy, intervenes most forcibly in the sexual relationships of men and women to prevent fulfillment. That is perhaps why Arthur Symonds, referring to Hardy as a fatalist, says he has only one subject: "not civilization, nor manners, but the principle of life itself, invisibly realized as Sex, seen visibly in the world as what we call Nature."²³

Tintagel becomes, finally, a fitting image of Hardy's world. An outpost of civilization jutting into the Atlantic, it provides protection against the harsh natural elements of wind, rain, and sea. It symbolizes man's mastery of nature, the fortress upon which he builds his hopes of security and peace. On these rugged, dangerous cliffs he imposes his laws and values. And within the walls of the castle, he lives out his destiny, wrestling with the strongest passion known to man, romantic love. His laws decreeing sexual love to be acceptable only in marriage prove futile against the dictates of fate and the urgings of the human heart. All the values of civilization, normally associated with the land,

collapse in the wake of fated love: Mark turns to savagery, Iseult the Whitehanded to simpering, excessive legalism, and the lovers to unsought-for lawlessness. Man's own systems and values, then, offer no security against the battery of fate and the primal impulses of the heart. The land, by extension, suggests the same inexorable doom as the sea, since fate operates through man's character and his institutions, in this case marriage, to doom him. Whereas Tintagel functions in the background or serves as one locale among several in the other Victorian versions of Tristan, in Hardy's play it is the foreground--it is the world. In Tennyson's Idylls, for instance, it is merely one outpost of a civilization collapsing from man's return to the beast; in Hardy, it is the world of every man, a world collapsing through the workings, external and internal, of fate. Neither sea nor land offers any hedge against that fate. Hardy's Tintagel presents in microcosm the two types of sexual love, domestic and passionate, ever at odds with each other, each equally doomed.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

¹"Mr. Hardy's Version of a Famous Love Story," Literary Digest International Book Review, 2 (1924), 111.

²Florence Emily Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891 (New York: Macmillan, 1928), pp. 98, 103, 120. This volume and The Later Years, 1892-1928 (New York: Macmillan, 1930) are hereafter cited in the text.

³Richard Little Purdy, Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 161.

⁴Carl J. Weber, Hardy's Love Poems (London: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 31-32.

⁵Viola Meynell, ed., Friends of a Lifetime: Letters to Sir Sydney Cockerell (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), p. 284.

⁶The letter is cited in J. O. Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy: A Handbook and Commentary (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), p. 651.

⁷"Thomas Hardy and the Dilemma of Naturalism (A Study of Hardy's Lyric Poetry)," Neuren Sprachen, N. S. 16 (1967), 256.

⁸Hardy's Love Poems, p. 11.

⁹Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 331. Hereafter cited as CP in the text.

¹⁰Hardy's Poetic Drama and the Theatre (New York: Pageant, 1965), pp. 1-11, 90.

¹¹The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, in The Dynasts; The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall (1924; rpt. New York: St. Martin's, 1963), II, 532. Further references to the play, cited in the text, are to this edition.

¹²James Glenn Collier, Jr., "Thomas Hardy's The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall: Its Artistry and Relation to His Life, Thought, and Works," Diss., University of North Carolina, 1970, p. 102.

¹³Bailey, p. 653.

¹⁴"Thomas Hardy's Tristram," Nation, 118 (1924), 38.

¹⁵"Poets and Poetry: Tristram and Iseult," Spectator, 131 (1923), 904.

¹⁶"Thomas Hardy's First Real Play," New York Times Magazine, Dec. 30, 1923, p. 6.

¹⁷"Isot Ma Drue, Isot M'Amie," The New Republic, 38 (Feb. 27, 1924), 24.

¹⁸"The Tristram-Legend and Thomas Hardy," Neophilologus, 9 (1924), 290-93.

¹⁹Brown, "At Dorchester," Saturday Review (London), 136 (1923), 613-14; Abercrombie, "Mr. Hardy's Play," Nation and Athenaeum, 34 (1923), 491.

²⁰"Thomas Hardy in a New Role," Forum, 71 (1923), 787-88.

²¹"Tristram and the Mummers," Times Literary Supplement, November 15, 1923, p. 767.

²²Collier, p. 138.

²³A Study of Thomas Hardy (London: Charles J. Sawyer, 1927), p. 6.

CONCLUSION

It is a bit curious, perhaps ironic, that when the high Victorians established their cult of love sanctifying woman they did so for reasons almost opposite those which first gave rise to the Tristan legend. According to Friedrich Heer in The Medieval World, the courtly love tradition, and Tristan in particular, found expression in the twelfth century partly as a protest against the strict, authoritarian system of marriage which was based on wealth or social position.¹ The Victorians too were concerned about such loveless marriages, but as a result of scientific developments, their primary concern centered on the loss of faith in a transcendent God. Like their medieval predecessors, they too sought refuge in love; but there the similarity ends. For where the troubadours seemed to advocate love outside marriage, the early Victorians sought to fortify the institution of marriage by hallowing the "angel in the House." Properly worshipped, woman could "save" the individual and play a vital role in the redemption of society as well. No such awful burden fell on the shoulders of the "courtly" lady.

What is remarkable is the capacity of the legend to sustain both visions. Its ability to do so rests largely on the opposition in the story between domestic and passionate love, an opposition primarily embodied in the two Iseults and reinforced by the imagery of land and sea. This same conflict helps to explain the total Victorian response to Tristan, for not all Victorians

subscribed to the domesticated love advocated by Arnold and Tennyson in their versions of Tristan. Swinburne, in fact, saw the domestic love of Tristan and Iseult of Brittany as patently destructive and the passionate love of Tristan and Iseult of Ireland as beautiful, if not entirely satisfying. Symons perceived the beauty of married love but obviously felt passionate love to be superior. Taken together, these four versions of Tristan reflect a deep division in the Victorian artistic temperament between social duty, morality, and public conscience on one hand and autonomy in art, aestheticism, and private conscience on the other. In a fifth version, Hardy ignores such a rigid dichotomy; he sees both types of love as doomed to failure and frustration in a naturalistic universe governed by accident and fate.

But Hardy's version, while consigning domestic and erotic love to unhappiness and eventual doom, points up perhaps the most distinctive feature of the Victorian versions of Tristan: the poet's need, whatever his attitude, to treat both types of love. This compulsion not only distinguishes them sharply from Wagner, who ignored married love in order to celebrate passionate love, but also testifies to the division in the temperament of the age. Most often the poets celebrate one type of love to the disadvantage of the other. But even when both types prove to be doomed (as in Hardy), they serve as points of contrast to each other. In brief, these Victorian poets were not content merely to explore the effects of one type of love on the human spirit; they felt compelled to explore--and often to deplore--its opposite as well.

For this reason the land and sea, images respectively of domesticity-society-stability and passion-freedom-fate, served their artistic purposes well.

In the moral approach to the legend, Arnold and Tennyson align themselves--at least temporarily--with the Victorian cult of married love insofar as they find domestic love to be a desirable and healthy alternative to the insatiable appetite of passionate love, which finally destroys its victims and may even wreak havoc with society.

Arnold, in "Tristram and Iseult," treats the passionate love of Tristram and Iseult of Ireland in a subdued, somewhat objective manner, perhaps because he had felt the power of passion in his affair with Marguerite. He sets the scene in Brittany, where Tristram lies dying, watched by his wife; out of the night of storms Iseult of Ireland sails into port to offer Tristram one final kiss and then die on his body--but quietly, without the ecstasy and transfiguration of Wagner's Iseult. In fact, Arnold makes his primary contribution to the legend by reserving his real sympathy for Iseult of Brittany, to whom he devotes the conclusion of his poem and for whom he creates a domestic milieu complete with two children, offspring of Tristram. She becomes a representative of domesticity, spending her days in an endless round of activities dictated by the values of land--home, family, security. She gazes upon the sea and obviously understands its dangers, just as she has observed and understood the passion of her husband and rival, but she does not venture beyond her own world of family

duty and responsibility. Without praising her directly, Arnold adroitly has his narrator attack the "fool passion" which consumed the lovers; more than any other factor, his management of the narrator betrays his sympathy for Iseult of Brittany.

Tennyson, on the other hand, keeps Isolt of Brittany in the background and concentrates instead on the sensuality of the lovers and the bestiality of Mark. Because he employs marriage as the basic metaphor of the Idylls (the marriage of soul and sense, knights and vows, Arthur and Guinevere, Tristram and Isolt of Brittany, Mark and Isolt of Britain), "The Last Tournament" echoes and compounds the social devastation inherent in the adultery first perpetrated by Lancelot and Guinevere. Unbridled passions in general--and sensuality in particular--undermine the ideals of Arthur's society. No one exemplifies so vividly those threats to the social fabric as the Tristram-Isolt-Mark triangle. By omitting the love potion, Tennyson makes the lovers responsible for the sensual love which delivers them into the hands of the savage Mark. And his sympathy may be said to rest with Isolt of Brittany in that she embodies, by implication, the marital fidelity which cements the social system; indeed, of the four major characters of the original legend, she is the only one in Tennyson's idyll not devoted, directly or indirectly, to destructiveness. Like Arnold's heroine, she is not affected with the restless tide of lust which courses through the lovers' veins. Although "The Last Tournament" develops the water-land imagery in less detail than the other Victorian versions of Tristan,

Tennyson relates the idea of passion (which he equates with license) to water in two specific instances: the tide of sensuality which threatens the kingdom from within and the tide of uncontrolled, uncivilized forces which batter the kingdom from without. His primary concern, of course, centers on the need to preserve and protect society (the land) from those forces.

Swinburne and Symons, following the lead of Wagner, represent a break from the high Victorian tendency to moralize the Tristan legend, to condemn the sensual love of Tristan and Iseult as immoral. In varying degrees, Wagner, Swinburne, and Symons all celebrate erotic, passionate love, even though they may, depending on how their versions are interpreted, see such love as an illusion. If it is an illusion, it is a beautiful one, and that particular element--love of beauty rendered in a beautiful form--characterizes all three versions, becoming the aesthetic creed for late nineteenth-century poetry. For the aesthetes morality and virtue have nothing to do with the theme of love. Transcendental, romantic love, whether illusion or reality, is merely a theme which they develop for its beauty alone--they nowhere attempt to teach the reader to shun or surrender to such love. In his passionate opera Tristan and Isolde, Wagner excises everything, including Iseult of the White Hands, that would detract from his vision of beauty. He stresses the beauty of transcendental desire, of the lovers' wish to merge their identities, and even of dying for the "world's grandest illusion." And perhaps most important, he restores the sea to its proper

place in the legend by capturing in his music the surge and swell of passion. Altogether, his operatic version of Tristan exercises an important influence on Swinburne and Symons.

For Swinburne, in Tristram of Lyonesse, that influence is twofold, thematic and imagistic. Wagner's interpretation of the lovers as desiring death because passion is impossible of fulfillment in the mundane sphere apparently reinforces Swinburne's idea of their love as doomed and perhaps leads him to see erotic love as an illusion, incapable of fulfilling either of the lovers. Long before their double doom (death and the obliteration of their bones by the sea), Swinburne suggests, in Tristram's joyous swim, that wholeness, identity, may be possible only when one pushes out from the realm of personality and society, the land, and into the realm of the buried, noumenal self, imaged, in this instance, by the sea. Further, he adopts much of Wagner's day-night imagery in his lyrical account of the frustration of love.

But Wagner's influence must not be overemphasized. Another influence, negative in impact, plays a key role in his Tristram: Swinburne's detestation of Tennyson's handling of the Arthurian legends in the Idylls. The two poets could not disagree more sharply. Whereas Tennyson makes marriage the basis of social values such as trust, loyalty, and stability, Swinburne sees marriage as just another social institution valuable not at all in forging one's own identity but valuable, if at all, merely in concretizing one of those illusions that sustain the ordinary man--that marriage is divinely ordained. This idea he embodies

most vividly in Iseult of the White Hands, who depends for her identity on the marriage contract. When that contract is violated, she turns jealous, bitter, destructive, and then prays for an opportunity to destroy Tristram. She is the exact opposite of the Breton wife in Arnold and Tennyson. Swinburne uses her, in brief, to contrast and heighten the beauty of romantic love.

Overall, Swinburne seizes on the beauty of achieved love, in youth and maturity, and the beauty of the sea, which grants Tristram peace and confers on him identity, selfhood. Beautiful as the experience of romantic love might be, it ultimately fails to satisfy; wholeness comes only in Tristram's encounter with the sea.

Symons, too, captures the beauty of passionate love in his verse drama Tristan and Iseult. Structurally, he tends to follow Wagner, setting, like the German composer, his play aboard ship (Act II), in the garden at Tintagel (Act III), and in Brittany (Act IV); only Act I (set in Ireland) is different. And his constant emphasis upon the background of sea--an image of enveloping passion--echoes Wagner. But Symons goes beyond Swinburne and Wagner in stressing the beauty of the soul in anguish, particularly in Tristan's struggle between love and honor and Iseult of Brittany's conflict in the last scene between lying and telling Tristan the truth about the sails. Because of the romantic ending, he obviously sympathizes with Tristan and Iseult of Ireland, but his tone in Act IV betrays a poignant, sincere affection for Iseult of Brittany. Of the aesthetic versions of the legend,

Symons' alone acknowledges the possibility of beauty in the domestic love of Iseult of Brittany. Still, he assigns Iseult of Ireland the dominant role in his play, characterizing her as a forthright heroine, determined to take charge whenever Tristan or any other character wavers. She emerges as something of the "New Woman" of late nineteenth-century literature, and Symons undoubtedly admires her courage. Together, however, the two Iseults reflect a division in Symons' mind between the desire for and the suspicion of passionate love. In this he resembles Arnold, but where Arnold opts for domestic love, Symons finally settles on the side of passionate love. Despite his divided loyalty, he agrees with Wagner and Swinburne on one essential point: domestic or married love is no more virtuous or moral than erotic, passionate love. He merely recognizes that domestic love may possess its own poignant beauty, and apparently feels haunted by the values of stability, loyalty, and duty.

Like the moralists and aesthetes before him, Hardy betrays his own artistic bias--the naturalistic--in his version of the legend, The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall. Broadly speaking, he sees man as the victim of fate, both external and internal. Externally, fate hovers and broods over the play in the symbol of the sea. Internally, fate operates through character--the savagery of Mark, the possessiveness of Iseult of Brittany, and the nobility and frustration of the lovers--to destroy the possibility of fulfillment in either type of love and even to undermine man's most civilized values: loyalty, trust,

decency. Unlike the moralists and aesthetes, Hardy takes the side of neither domestic nor passionate love but sees both as a tangle of broken promises and unfulfilled dreams, doomed to frustration and failure. One of his chief contributions to the legend, the confrontation of the two Iseults, points up the idea of doom and futility; Iseult of Brittany must surrender Tristram to Queen Iseult only moments before the Queen must see him die. Both Iseults--both types of love--are doomed to failure. Another contribution, the attempted reconciliation of the romantic and brutal endings, lends further point to the idea of doom. Fate intervenes in Hardy's version of the older romantic ending to rob the story of romance: Tristram recovers from almost certain death only to hasten to Tintagel and a brutally realistic death at the hands of Mark. Even Queen Iseult's suicide, after she kills Mark, seems devoid of romance, though Sir Andret interprets it as such. Certainly the conclusion lacks the rapture and ecstasy of Wagner and Swinburne. Only Iseult of Brittany remains alive, and her bitterness scarcely witnesses to the desirability of domestic love. She contrasts sharply to the calm Breton wife in Arnold and the agonized one in Symons. The disintegration of the world of Tintagel and all it symbolizes--order, stability, civilization, protection from the outer seas and storms--clearly demonstrates Hardy's belief that love, whether domestic or passionate, cannot redeem anyone from himself or the forces around him, that love instead leads inevitably to frustration and disillusionment.

The five Victorian versions of Tristan, then, demonstrate an evolution in both the purpose of art and the attitude taken toward love. Arnold and Tennyson, concerned with the vacuum created by the loss of faith in a transcendent God, see in a stable, domestic love at least one possibility of faith; they consequently view the legend from a didactic angle, condemning the lovers and reserving their sympathy for Iseult of Brittany, the representative of social order, domesticity, and loyalty. Swinburne and Symonds object to art whose purpose is to teach and to any view of love which exalts the proper over the beautiful. Writing from aesthetic values, they therefore celebrate the passion, charm, and romance of the lovers as superior to the jealous, lawful love of Iseult of Brittany. Hardy takes a more modern, realistic approach than either of these groups. In his naturalistic version, he sees both types of love as less than ideal; both are fraught with difficulty and both are doomed, if not to outright failure, then assuredly to disillusionment and unhappiness. He celebrates neither to the disadvantage of the other but paints instead the problems inherent in each and the crises caused by their confrontation with each other.

Qualifications to this scheme, however, are abundant. Arnold, for instance, displays a warmth and tenderness in his treatment of the lovers, despite his sympathy for Iseult of Brittany. Tennyson espouses the cause of Iseult of Brittany less than he castigates the sensuality of the lovers. Swinburne, though celebrating passionate love, recognizes that it too may

be an illusion; for this reason, he allows Tristram to experience complete fulfillment only once, outside the context of sexual love, in his encounter with the sea. Symonds, before finally settling on the side of the lovers, captures in a sensitive portrait the internal anguish of Iseult of Brittany; he does not, like Swinburne, condemn her love, though he does not agree with it. Finally, Hardy's more realistic attitude toward love does not carry over into his technique; Merlin and the mummers, for example, seem completely fantastic, and Queen Iseult's suicide smacks less of realism than sheer melodrama.

Still, the various versions of Tristan mirror changes in Victorian tastes and attitudes toward love and art. The whole course of Victorian literature did not evolve so smoothly, of course, from the moralistic to the aesthetic to the naturalistic. Writers of various persuasions worked contemporaneously, and the moralists, aesthetes, and naturalists overlapped each other. But the interpretations of the Tristan legend and the uses to which it was put do offer one barometer to the changes in Victorian attitudes toward love and art.

Viewed in total perspective, Hardy's attitude toward love strikes a more modern note than that of the moralists and aesthetes, chiefly because he strives toward no ideal. What the moralists and aesthetes seek, after all, is a romantic ideal, whether it be regenerative domestic love or beautiful passionate love; in either case, such love, precisely because it stresses the ideal, is likely to lead to the disharmony, frustration, and disillusionment

which Hardy dramatizes. Many a popular modern novel or movie, though rarely if ever with the taste or depth of a Tennyson or Swinburne, continues this pursuit of an ideal marriage or love affair. But the major thrust of serious modern literature has been toward psychological realism in the treatment of love, a process initiated in the Victorian era in such a work as Meredith's Modern Love. Joyce's Ulysses, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, and Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? are but three examples.

Tristan, too, has continued to prove a fertile ground for modern authors. John Masefield's play Tristan and Isolt (1927) portrays Tristan as a man of action overcome by the power of love; he goes mad and dies pathetically in the woods, after which Iselt stabs herself. John Erskine's novel Tristan and Isolde: Restoring Palamede (1932) is most memorable not for the lead characters but for the concentration on Palamede, with whom Brangwain falls helplessly in love. Both works are far less realistic than E. A. Robinson's Tristram (1927), which intellectualizes and dissects the emotions of Tristram and Isolt. Like Tennyson, he omits the love potion and makes the lovers responsible for their love; but the analytical and introspective tone renders them typically modern, helplessly caught in the snare of passion. Isolt of Brittany, on the other hand, emerges as the most sympathetic character for many readers. Modeled on Arnold's heroine, she nevertheless comes off less the representative of domesticity than the symbol of the intelligent woman doomed through her very wisdom to understand her part in a situation

which she is helpless to control.

Finally, it is possible to agree with de Rougemont's contention in Love in the Western World that perhaps no legend has so deeply penetrated the Western psyche as that of Tristan. However, there is no need to concur in his opinion that passion alone accounts for that phenomenon. For the Victorians at least--and they were, with Wagner, the first to revive the legend--the dramatic tension between passionate love and married love was the vital feature of the story. And when their versions of Tristan are viewed from a larger perspective, it is possible to see in them an image of the Victorian age: divided in temperament and by the aims of art but evolving slowly toward twentieth-century realism.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

¹Trans. Janet Sondheimer (Cleveland: World, 1961),
pp. 134-37.

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VITA

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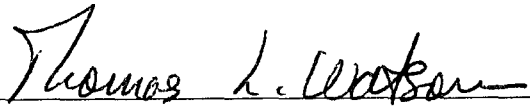
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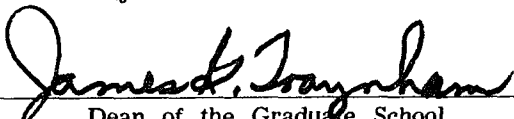
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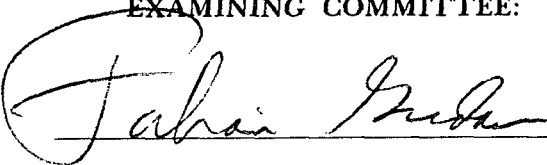
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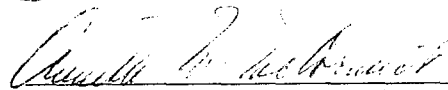
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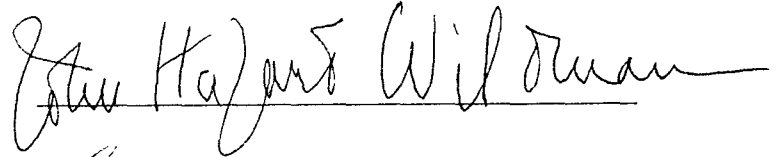

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